PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 91

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1985-86

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THIRTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 91**

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1985-86

House of Commons

Monday 3 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

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[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Public Transport (Passenger Safety)

1. **Ms. Richardson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to seek to improve the wellbeing and safety of women travelling on public transport.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I have recently announced a new study of crime on the London Underground. I expect to receive the report and recommendations by the end of July. This study will cover the safety of women.

Ms. Richardson: The Secretary of State has taken a long time to instigate that survey. Does he realise that women are the major users of public transport? The GLC has carried out the only survey of women by women to identify the difficulties which they experience on buses, underground trains and so on, and in badly lit streets. Over three quarters of them said that they felt unsafe at night. Will the right hon. Gentleman examine the findings of the GLC and proposals from other metropolitan authorities, and improve the safety of women, by recruiting more conductors and other staff, rather than relying on machines, which cannot respond to cries for help?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Lady is a little over-critical. We have set up a study into the problems on the Underground. The problems of bus staff are being examined, as is violence to road passenger transport staff, by another of my Department's working groups, which will report shortly. A great deal is being done to investigate what can be done, and a lot is being done. If the hon. Lady would like to go to the Bank station, she will see the plans for modernising it, making it better lit and better laid out. Those are the sorts of ways in which to prevent crime, and the hon. Lady will find that the Government are doing a lot in that direction.

Mr. McCrindle: If, as it is reported, London Regional Transport is anxious to appoint additional members of the British Transport police, will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that he will turn a sympathetic ear to any appeal for additional funds which may be required as a result?

Mr. Ridley: The British Transport police have been increased substantially as a result of the perceived problem to which my hon. Friend refers. In the first instance such matters are for London Regional Transport or the bus operator, whoever he may be, but we are doing all that we can to assist them.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Will the Secretary of State accept that one of the things that he can do to help is the early phasing out from, Charing Cross on southern region of outdated stock with individual compartment carriages, because their use late at night worries women.

Mr. Ridley: It is for British Rail to propose replacing old stock of that sort, and if it makes an application to us for investment approval we shall consider it quickly and sympathetically.

Mr. Squire: I thank my right hon. Friend for his announcement today, which I am sure will be given a greater welcome by women in general than it was by the Opposition Front Bench. May I underline that a number of men and women are deterred from travelling on the underground and that, in a sense, the amount of deterrence is greater than the number of attacks that take place?

Mr. Ridley: I think that that is true, but I am sure that the ways that are being examined by London Regional Transport to improve the situation will all help. For some time efforts have been made to improve lighting and the safety of ticket and other staff, and to increase the presence of the British Transport police and inspectors in order to improve the situation.

Mr. Tony Banks: Has the Secretary of State read the GLC women's committee's pamphlet "Women on the Move" which, to make the point in another way from my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), makes it clear that only 17 per cent. of women feel safe travelling on public transport at night. In order to try to increase the number of women who want to travel on the tube and buses, and feel safe doing so, will he ask London Regional Transport to drop its proposals for further one-person operated buses and the reduction of guards on tubes, both of which add to the feeling of insecurity among women travelling on London transport?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman must understand that it is taking a little time to get the London Underground more efficient, safe, and attractive to passengers. We took the system away from the GLC only 18 months ago and we have had remarkable progress in rectifying the GLC's errors.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I appreciate the efforts that my right hon. Friend has been making for the safety of women. However, the question also refers to "the wellbeing" of women. Would it not be for the wellbeing and convenience of women if there were female attendants looking after female toilets?

Mr. Ridley: I shall pass that important point on to the authorities.

Local Government Reform

2. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with county officials concerning the effect of abolition of the metropolitan counties on public transport in those areas.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): There has been a continuing dialogue between my Department and the officers of local authorities and passenger transport executives.

Mr. Thorne: As that tells me nothing in answer to my question, will the Minister say what he is doing to avoid increased fares and poorer services as a consequence of the Government's policies?

Mr. Mitchell: The level of fares is a matter for the bus operator concerned.

Sir John Osborn: Is it not an error in timing that the South Yorkshire passenger transport authority has introduced proposals for a tram in Sheffield when the authority has been abolished and is running into serious deficit in its financing?

Mr. Mitchell: That is a matter for the authority, and on that matter it is answerable to its local electorate.

Mr. Crowther: Has the Minister learnt from his discussions that the effect of abolishing the South Yorkshire county council, coupled with the implementation of the last two Transport Acts, will be to treble at least the fares, to cut services substantially and to make some hundreds of the staff redundant in an area of high unemployment? Does he regard this as a mark of progress in a civilised society?

Mr. Mitchell: It is important to get a better balance between the amount paid by the user and the amount paid by the ratepayer. The high level of rates in South Yorkshire has undoubtedly contributed to the high level of unemployment there. In South Yorkshire the subsidy on transport amounts to 62·8 per cent. of the cost in cash terms for operating the service, while only 22 per cent. comes from fares. Nowhere else in the country is there such an extraordinary state of affairs.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Minister admit, openly and plainly, that the responsibility for increased fares, reductions in services and increased redundancies rests solely with the Chancellor of the Exchequer because of the expenditure limits that he has set?

Mr. Mitchell: It is for the passenger transport authority to establish the policy, and for the passenger transport executive to decide its priorities in the expenditure that it will undertake during the year as between the level of fares and the extent of service and of concessions.

Channel Tunnel

3. **Mr. Snape** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to allocate additional funds to British Rail in the light of Her Majesty's Government's decision to proceed with the fixed Channel link.

Mr. Ridley: External financing limits for 1990-91 to 1992-3, the years of maximum BR capital expenditure on Channel fixed link services, have not been set, but the Government recognise that BR's investment in these services will require a higher level of external financing than would otherwise have been the case.

Mr. Snape: Will the Secretary of State concede that he said recently, in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), that he would not allow EFL constraints to affect British Rail investment in new rolling stock for the Channel link? Will he also accept that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport in the other place said exactly the opposite—that EFL would have to be taken into consideration? Will he sort out the departmental act, and will he give a guarantee that all the railway stock that will be needed will be built in Britain?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is, as always, wrong. My noble Friend said that the expenditure will have to be accommodated within the EFL—indeed, it will—and I say that the EFL will be big enough to accommodate it. I do not understand what the argument is.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that during the past five years the Government have given more investment support to British Rail than any previous Government? The Opposition's protests are not consistent with the present position.

Mr. Ridley: It must be extremely disappointing to the Opposition that, since 1979, more than £2·25 billion at today's prices has been invested by British Rail, plus £100 million a year on the installation of continuous welded rail. Those startling and impressive figures completely refute any charge that the Opposition might make that we have cut investment.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: To limit development in the south-east following the building of the Channel tunnel, will the right hon. Gentleman accept that some compensation to the north will be required? That can be done by the improvement of the road and rail network to serve not just the London area but to provide direct links to the north, to make up for the damage that will be caused to it by the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Ridley: The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that £700 million or £800 million of railway investment will flow from the decision to build the Channel Tunnel Group's scheme. He may not know that there are no railway workshops in the south-east. They are all in the north and in the midlands. He might acknowledge the fact that those jobs will come to the areas about which he is talking. Further, if the Channel tunnel results in lower transport costs and quicker and more certain transport across the Channel, it will be of great assistance to his constituents. If he would stop trying to fight the party battle and recognise the immense advantages of what is happening, he would get on better with his constituents.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: How many additional jobs does my right hon. Friend think will result from this additional investment?

Mr. Ridley: It is hard to say precisely, but tomorrow we shall be publishing a White Paper from which my hon. Friend will discover the best guesses that we can make about extra employment and where it will occur. Of course, it will be for the many industrial companies in the midlands and the north to make sure that they win the contracts when they are put out to tender.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister accept that there is some anxiety that the Channel fixed link will not necessarily benefit the north? If it is to benefit the north, we must have decent, first-class links across London. Will the Secretary of State consider this and ensure that British Rail provides not just links, but first-class, fast links across London so that the north and the regions can consider themselves connected to the fixed link?

Mr. Ridley: I have frequently discussed this point with the chairman of British Rail. As the opportunities which the link gives to British Rail become more widely appreciated and worked out, there will be scope for through rail services from the entire country to the entire continent. British Rail has not had such an opportunity for many a generation, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the board is fully aware of it.

Mr. Adley: Will my right hon. Friend remind the Opposition that he has already authorised the Snow Hill link, which will be one cross-London link? Following the previous two questions from the Opposition, will my right hon. Friend invite British Rail to introduce a specific plan to make the most of the Channel tunnel for the north by using Kensington Olympia station and the west London line as a link to the Channel tunnel, and upgrading the south-eastern and Chatham line from Redhill to Reading, which would link straight through to the north and the west? Will he invite the chairman to produce a report for him?

Mr. Ridley: It is for the chairman of British Rail to say how he believes it is best to open up the opportunities which the link will provide. I cannot claim to know more than he does about the railway system. It is right that the railways should make proposals. We shall assess them in the light of their viability and the time scale in which they would have to be built. It has not been possible to do that in the short time since the decision was made.

4. **Mr. Robert Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail to discuss the fixed Channel link.

11. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of the British Railways Board, he will raise with him the implications for British Rail of Her Majesty's Government's decision to proceed with a fixed Channel link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I meet the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest. I last discussed the Channel fixed link with him on 22 January.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Secretary of State agree that the EFL for British Rail should be set far enough ahead so that we can all see what will happen? It will enable and encourage British Rail to develop and expand services not just in the south-east of England but in the north and Scotland, and clarify the different view taken by him and his noble Friend in the other place. Will he give an assurance that the EFL will be expanded to take account of British Rail's needs for the Channel link and that other investment required by British Rail will not be curtailed as a result of the Channel link decision?

Mr. Ridley: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Can we take it, therefore, that the Secretary of State will be recommending to his Cabinet colleagues a bigger EFL for British Rail in the years ahead? In particular, will he take note of the need for further investment in the Ashford to London line? If it is to cater for the Channel tunnel and commuters, it will need a great deal of capital expenditure?

Mr. Ridley: In the relevant years—1990 to 1993—the railways' provisional programme of investment is such that, even with investment in the Channel fixed link, it will be investing less than at present. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's second point is that the costs of the Ashford line are included in the investment plans which British Rail has put forward as an immediate consequence of the Channel Tunnel Group's proposals. British Rail estimates that if it has high-speed trains working between London, Paris and Brussels the investment will be £390 million, but that if it has conventional-speed trains it will be £290 million. A decision as to which trains will be used has not yet been taken.

Mr. Gow: Are there any outstanding matters still to be settled between the Channel Tunnel Group, BR and SNCF?

Mr. Ridley: I was careful to ensure that the bones of an agreement were reached between the two railways and between the combined railways and the Channel Tunnel Group before the decision was finally taken. The agreement is that there will be a 50-50 joint venture between BR and SNCF. They will be able to decide jointly on the services, the costs, the share of the revenue and the investment. I believe that that is a thoroughly satisfactory deal for BR. BR is content with, and has agreed the

schedule of tolls to be charged on trains passing through the Channel tunnel. I cannot at the moment speak definitely for SNCF in that respect.

Mr. Aitken: Does my right hon. Friend recall that before the announcement of the Channel tunnel decision he gave the impression of being a Scrooge-like Minister who would not allow a penny of taxpayers' money to be spent in connection with the project? Since the announcement, and in the House this afternoon, he has given a somewhat different impression—that of a Lord Bountiful who is willing to spend money on expanding the EFL and on railways for the north. Does my right hon. Friend not think that he may be in danger of suffering from a little schizophrenia?

Mr. Ridley: I know that my hon. Friend will never lack ingenuity in finding ways in which to question the Channel tunnel decision. This afternoon is no exception. I have always made it clear to the House that the essential road links and railway investment which result from the decision to build the Channel link would be accepted by the Government. We accept the need to build roads and sanction railway investment to any new port, new town or new factory where the traffic justifies increased infrastructure expenditure.

Mr. Ron Lewis: In his original answer the right hon. Gentleman admitted that there would be more funding for British Rail as a result of the Channel tunnel. Is that why he opposed the scheme?

Mr. Ridley: I did not hear the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he could repeat his question.

Mr. Ron Lewis: There are none so deaf as those who will not hear, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman has admitted that the Channel tunnel will mean extra funding for British Rail. Is that why he originally opposed the scheme?

Mr. Ridley: I was opposed to the original scheme 11 years ago because it was to be paid for by taxpayers. I am in favour of this scheme because it will not involve taxpayers' money for the construction of the link, and it will therefore not be at the expense of other Government programmes which could have serious consequences for public spending.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the central question concerning the project is not whether we or the French get the most out of it, but how it can be directed so as to give the maximum benefit to both nations?

Mr. Ridley: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Another question is whether the people who use the link will benefit, whether as passengers or as senders of freight. If they will not benefit, I shall be very surprised if the City finances the scheme. The fact that the City is likely to be prepared to finance the scheme is evidence of real need among users, which will be met profitably.

Mr. Leadbitter: The Secretary of State has given certain assurances about communication development concerning the fixed link, but, after all these months, he has still not convinced industrialists in the north. When he has discussions with the chairman of British Rail and other transport interests, will he take account of the concern of industrialists and trade unionists in the north and of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority, the third largest in the United Kingdom, which has expressed its deep worry about future trade when the link is developed?

Mr. Ridley: I sometimes wonder how the Labour party, which is always calling for more investment, more infrastructure and more jobs in heavy industry, can find such contorted ways in which to disagree with the biggest infrastructure project that the Government have ever announced. They love it in general, but when projects that will provide many jobs in the north, the midlands and elsewhere are announced, they cannot even bring themselves to welcome them.

Independent Airlines (Financial Assistance)

5. **Mr. McCrindle** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reached a decision on the Civil Aviation Authority's advice on the allocation of British Airways' financial assistance to independent airlines; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): Yes, Sir. Based upon the Civil Aviation Authority's advice, we have recommended 15 services to British Airways for assistance. I hope that the detailed arrangements can now be completed quickly so that the new services can be started as soon as possible.

Mr. McCrindle: I welcome the development of these new services, but will my hon. Friend say what steps he has taken to ensure that the appropriate traffic rights are available? Will he confirm that the other undertaking in last year's White Paper—the development of longer-haul services in competition with British Airways—remains part of the Government's policy? What is he doing to prosecute that?

Mr. Spicer: As for traffic rights, following the new, more liberal, arrangements that we have made with Scandinavia and West Germany, traffic rights are available on all routes except Glasgow to Gothenburg and Aberdeen to Esbjerg, and we hope that they will be sorted out soon. Our policy on multiple designation was set out in the White Paper on airline competition policy and we are, of course, sticking to it.

Mr. Carter-Jones: If the Minister is so keen on multiple designation, would he be prepared to add some money to that already being paid by British Airways to finance this scheme?

Mr. Spicer: No, Sir. The agreement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last year was for £450,000 to be given to 15 routes, which is a pretty generous arrangement.

Mr. Steen: As Britain has more independent and charter airlines than any other European country, will my hon. Friend ensure that our European partners do not drive some of our independent airlines out of business by insisting on noise regulations for those airlines that fly special planes not used by other European countries?

Mr. Spicer: I am mindful, as is my hon. Friend, who does much work in that area for the industry, of the problems and the opportunities facing our airlines. In Europe our airlines are in a strong position—due in

large measure to the policies of this Government. We shall do everything that we can to ensure that those opportunities are fulfilled.

British Rail Engineering Ltd.

6. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the value of export orders achieved by British Rail Engineering Ltd. during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and how this compares with each of the preceding five years.

Mr. Ridley: BREL exports in 1985 were worth some £12 million. Exports in the years 1980 to 1984 were £34 million, £19 million, £3 million, £1·5 million and £30 million.

Mr. Gregory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the figures are disappointing, the prospect for British Rail Engineering Ltd. looks good, especially with its design team? Does he further agree that the greatest obstacle to increasing exports is the negative view adopted by the conveners of the unions in opposing innovation? Will he support the management of British Rail Engineering Ltd. and help ensure maximum possible exports?

Mr. Ridley: I pay tribute to BREL for its excellent efforts to obtain more overseas work. Last year it submitted tenders and indicative bids for export orders worth £580 million. More than 400 overseas trips were made to gain business. I am aware of a large number of possible orders in the offing. I congratulate BREL on its sterling efforts to try to increase business through exports. I realise that that is difficult, because many railways operate a protective attitude to exports. Despite that, BREL is beginning to break through in many parts of the world.

Mrs. Dunwoody: How many of those export orders were lost because of the attitude of the Government and the Export Credits Guarantee Department? Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that it is sensible to tell people that they are likely to lose their jobs in BREL because of privatisation and at the same time expect them to work harder?

Mr. Ridley: The answer to the first question is none. As to the second question, no one has suggested that those people should lose their jobs. We are discussing extra efforts for the core works of BREL in the export business so that it can expand and create more jobs.

Mr. Hirst: I warmly applaud the efforts of BREL to win overseas orders. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what proportion of the export sales have been manufactured at BREL's Glasgow works, where many of my constituents work? Does he regard it as disappointing that the management have proposed the downgrading of that works to a repair unit for ScotRail instead of using the undoubted talents and abilities of that work force for export orders?

Mr. Ridley: The works at Springburn are devoted to repair and maintenance and not to new build or heavy reconstruction. British Rail envisaged BREL handing over the works to ScotRail in 1987 as the main works to repair and maintain Scottish rolling stock. As such, it is not possible for them to participate in new export services, which are confined to the core BREL works at York, Derby and Crewe.

Mr. Snape: Does the Secretary of State accept that since the Conservative party took office, the railway works at Shildon, Stratford and most of Horwich have closed? Does he accept that Swindon is scheduled shortly to close and that the works at Glasgow are also under threat? Does he accept that up to 12,000 further redundancies in BREL are threatened and that it will take more than the disgraceful slur from his creeping hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) to alter that?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is the Government's intention to run down BREL even further prior to privatisation and that the public sector will again pick up the bill, while the private sector picks up the orders? Railwaymen will not forget the right hon. Gentleman's role in that.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has been told—again he does not seem to take it in—that his pressure for increased investment in the railways, which has been met, as I said earlier, has resulted in rolling stock that does not require so much repair, maintenance and reconstruction because it is new and of a higher quality. That has been the cause of the rundown in BREL's work force. To try to increase employment in the railway engineering industry I have agreed with the chairman of British Rail the new arrangements whereby BREL's activities will be split into repair and new build. The new build part will, therefore, at least have the opportunity to gain export orders. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that. He never seems to welcome good news.

Coaches (Speed Governors)

7. **Mr. Knowles** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the response of the bus and coach industry to his proposal that all coaches should be fitted with speed governors.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): The Bus and Coach Council has supported speed governors as a means of ensuring that coaches observe the motorway speed limit. The council is involved in the work now under way to establish a technical specification for speed governors.

Mr. Knowles: Is my hon. Friend aware that this measure will be a great relief to all who use the motorways, especially the M1? Will he underline his statement that the bus and coach operators will be involved closely in establishing a technical specification for speed governors?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, Sir. I think that the introduction of speed governors will be welcome not only to other users of the motorways but to passengers on the buses and coaches and, I suspect, to drivers.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that buses and coaches travelling at more than 70 miles an hour are the new biggest menace on the motorways? Does he agree that anything that can be done to curb them will be very much welcomed?

Mr. Bottomley: I think that my hon. Friend speaks for many hon. Members. Public concern during the past two years has led to the proposal to introduce speed governors.

London Taxicard Scheme

9. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the London taxicard scheme following the agreement reached by the London co-ordinating committee of boroughs.

Mr. David Mitchell: Around 30 such letters have been received in the last four months. I have welcomed the decision of the London boroughs to continue the scheme along with other concessionary travel arrangements.

Mr. Greenway: Is it not a matter for congratulation that after the abolition of the GLC all the London borough's will continue the taxicard scheme and that concessionary travel passes for pensioners, the disabled and blind people and dial-a-ride will continue? Will my hon. Friend end, once and for all, the GLC's constant lies, which are put about at public expense, that those services will not continue after abolition?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is correct in saying that the taxicard and dial-a-ride schemes will continue. I join him in deploring the deception by which elderly and disabled people are frightened and misled by the GLC's campaign suggesting that that would not happen.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that all the London boroughs have not agreed to support the taxicard scheme? The Tory boroughs of Sutton, Bromley, Barnet and Hillingdon have all refused to become involved in the Londonwide scheme for the taxicard. What pressure will the hon. Gentleman put on those Tory boroughs to come into the scheme, or will he be as complacent as they are?

Mr. Mitchell: That is a decision for them. It is a democratically arrived at decision, for which they will take responsibility. They will be answerable to the electorate for their decision.

Channel Tunnel

10. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the Government's decision to proceed with a fixed Channel link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: Since 20 January we have received a small number of letters about the fixed link from members of the public.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend accept, once again, universal congratulations to himself and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, because exactly the right scheme has been chosen to give a much-needed boost to British Rail, which needs that long-term development? Does he agree that overnight this has improved Anglo-French relations and shown that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is a good European after all? As the French immediately announced that in the period up to the opening of the link they would spend £700 million on infrastructure, including transport infrastructure, around the Channel tunnel entrance on their side, will my hon. Friend consider again the merits of doing the same on the British side?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is correct in saying that this will be a boost to British Rail. One of the big advantages will be the way in which freight will be able to move throughout the European network from stations in the United Kingdom. I suggest that my right hon. Friend should wait for the White Paper tomorrow, which will give him a great deal of information on expenditure.

Mr. Boyes: Does the Minister recall that on 20 January the Secretary of State said in his statement that he would have to consider carefully the employment consequences of the development? Is he aware that people in my area find it astonishing and incredible that the Secretary of State could make an announcement about a project without considering the employment consequences?

Can the Minister assure us that if the development, to which I am opposed, goes ahead, the north-east will receive special consideration in terms not only of the rail network, but, the road network? Is he aware that there is no motorway between Darlington and Doncaster, which is something that industries in the north-east desperately need?

Mr. Mitchell: The consequences of the project on employment were taken into account by the Government and formed part of the assessment process when considering the four projects in detail. A very large volume of orders will be available to be won, but they will not be allocated to any part of the country. They must be won by people competing for them successfully.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Westland plc

49. **Mr. Straw** asked the Attorney-General when he was first asked to give legal advice on the proposed financial reconstruction arrangements for Westland plc; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General (Sir Michael Havers): The two letters from my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence dated 6 and 7 January 1986, which have been placed in the Library, reveal the fact that advice was given by him on 31 December 1985 and on those two days. In accordance with the convention on Law Officers' advice, I am not prepared to disclose whether I or my hon. and learned Friend was asked to give legal advice on the proposed financial reconstruction arrangements for Westland plc on any other occasion.

Mr. Straw: On the leak of the Solicitor-General's letter, the Prime Minister admitted to the House on 27 January that at least by 7 January she was told

"in general terms, that there had been contacts between my office and the Department of Trade and Industry."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 657.]

in advance of the leak.

Did the Prime Minister at any time between 7 January and 23 January share that general knowledge with the Attorney-General or the Solicitor-General, and if so, on what date?

The Attorney-General: The only time that I had any communication with the Prime Minister was on 22 January, when the Secretary of the Cabinet gave us an outline of his report.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this is just the sort of question that amplifies the policy of the Labour party of obeying only those laws that it finds advantageous to accept? Labour Members have

stated on numerous occasions that advice between Law Officers and members of the Cabinet is in forbidden territory.

The Attorney-General: I agree with my hon. Friend. It has been a long-standing convention that neither the fact nor the content of advice should be disclosed.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Bearing in mind that the Solicitor-General gave his advice on the usual confidential terms, will the Attorney-General tell us, first, whether the prosecution of Mr. Bernard Ingham under section 2 of the Official Secrets Act has been considered, and, secondly, why it has not been proceeded with?

The Attorney-General: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in her statement, after consultation with the Director of Public Prosecutions and senior Treasury counsel, I took the view that my guidelines would not be fulfilled by any prosecution.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Opposition are following a line of disreputable questioning? Are they not pleading confidentiality when it suites them, while taking the opposite view when that suits them?

The Attorney-General: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is to be regretted that the statement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her speech have not been accepted as they should have been.

Mr. John Morris: When the Attorney-General replied to the House in a written answer on 16 January that the internal inquiry into the leak was

"still some considerable way from being completed"—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1986; Vol. 89, c. *614*.]

was he then aware that it was an inquiry into an official leak, and what legal advice was he then tendering? Was his Department consulted in any way on the proposed use of the Solicitor-General's letter? Are there precedents for Law Officers' letters being used as weapons for publicly chastising ministerial colleagues?

The Attorney-General: I consulted the Cabinet Secretary and expressed my view that it was essential that an inquiry into the leak should be set up. I did not know any more about the inquiry until I was informed of the results. I was informed first in summary form and then I was provided with the actual document on 22 January, the same day on which it was given to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. As for leaking, I have nothing to add to what has already been said. I agree entirely with what my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General said in his letter of 7 January.

52. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the offer of immunity to a civil servant arising from the inquiry into the leak of the letter sent by the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence on the Westland affair.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said to the House with my agreement on 23 January, and to my three written answers to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) on 27 January.

Mr. Winnick: Why did the director of information in the Department of Trade and Industry require immunity from prosecution? Is it not clear that she was understandably anxious not to be used as a scapegoat in this affair? Will the private secretaries who have been involved in the matter at No. 10 and the Department of Trade and Industry be given immunity, if they so require it, as a result of the latest developments? Does the Attorney-General accept that it is most unfortunate that the Solicitor-General was used in the first place by the Prime Minister in her war against the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)?

The Attorney-General: There is no question of my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General being used — *[Interruption.]* When his attention was drawn on Saturday by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the letter which had been published in full in *The Times* from the then Secretary of State for Defence, he telephoned the then Secretary of State for Defence and told him of his anxieties about the inaccuracies in the letter and wrote a letter, entirely of his own decision, on the Monday morning.

Mr. Winnick: Why was immunity given?

The Attorney-General: The answer to that question is the one which I have already given in a number of replies to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough.

Mr. Spencer: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is a constitutional necessity that Law Officers' advice should be confidential?

The Attorney-General: That is a long-established convention and one which the House should think carefully about before seeking to change it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Did the Solicitor-General discuss his letter to the then Secretary of State for Defence with the Prime Minister on 6, 7, 8 or 9 January? Secondly, if the Solicitor-General is asked to give evidence to the Select Committee on Defence, will he be able to do so?

The Attorney-General: The answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question is no. There was no such communication on any of those days. As for the second part of his supplementary question, I would need notice.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the use by any Government of leaks by public servants is demoralising to the public service? May we be assured that the practice will now cease?

The Attorney-General: I cannot give that assurance, save on behalf of my own Department. I am happy to say that there have been no leaks from my Department since I have been in office. I agree with my hon. Friend that leaking of any sort is deplorable. I agree entirely with the phrase used by my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General at the end of his letter of 7 January.

Mr. John Morris Is it a fair summary to say that the Solicitor-General was being used by other Ministers, that the Attorney-General was hoodwinked, in that he was not told the proper basis for the inquiry, that the salient facts were known to the Prime Minister from the start, and that in the bogus inquiry he was persuaded to grant immunity when he knew, or should have known, or should have been told, that there was no question of a prosecution and that it was an official leak?

The Attorney-General: There is no truth in the allegation that my hon. and learned Friend was being used.

When I was asked to grant immunity because the girl—the information officer—was refusing to give evidence unless she had immunity and her evidence was uniquely important in the pursuance of the inquiry, I was also told enough to make it clear to me that under no circumstances would I have prosecuted her in any event.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade Provision

54. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent the aid and trade provision in 1985-86 and 1986-87 is to be funded from sources outside his Department.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): The aid and trade provision is a separate allocation of funds within the aid programme. It is not funded from any other source.

Mr. Deakins: Is it not inequitable that the Department of Trade and Industry, which gets most of the benefit from the ATP, makes no contribution towards the total and rising cost of that provision? Will the Minister consider seriously for the future asking his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry for a contribution, either in whole or in part?

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman must understand that the funds for the ATP come from public expenditure funds as a whole. It is important to remember that the ATP provides both jobs and employment in Britain, and schemes of real developmental value in the Third world.

Mr. Forman: Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether, if the ATP were to come from a different departmental budget, for example the Department of Trade and Industry budget, the scheme, which is admirable and needs to be expanded, might fall foul of GATT rules?

Mr. Raison: My hon. Friend is broadly right. The important point is that this is aid. It counts as, and is recorded as, aid, and is directed to developmental as well as commercial ends.

Mr. Beith: Is it not the case that the ATP has virtually trebled in size, while provision for rural development has decreased? Is it not inevitable that such emphasis on the ATP will distort the priorities which the Minister's Department should have as its main concern?

Mr. Raison: The ATP has certainly increased in size over the years since it was started by the right hon. Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart). However, we are now putting increasing emphasis on rural development, and I recently announced some valuable schemes.

Indonesia

55. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the level of overseas aid to Indonesia in each of the last five years.

Mr. Raison: Gross bilateral aid to Indonesia includes capital aid, technical co-operation, aid and trade provision and investment by the Commonwealth Development Corporation. In the years 1980 to 1984 aid amounted to £11·19 million, £15·35 million, £17·22 million, £12·36 million and £28·29 million, respectively.

Mr. Clarke: Notwithstanding those generous figures and the supply of arms from this country, Indonesia has continued its policy of suppression against its own people, those in East Timor, and refugees in Papua New Guinea. What protest will be made?

Mr. Raison: The Indonesian Government are well aware of our position, namely, that we are against abuses of human rights, wherever they occur. However, the fact remains that Indonesia needs aid and can make good use of it.

Zambia

56. **Mr. Mc Crindle** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to help the Zambian economy.

Mr. Raison: We have pledged more than £30 million to the Zambian Government since last summer. In June we agreed to provide £4 million in programme aid, and £10 million to be associated with the World Bank's special facility. In December we undertook to provide a further £8 million in programme aid, and £5 million in association with the special facility. We also agreed a special grant of more than £1·5 million to permit the clearance of arrears of payments on aid loans. In addition, I have agreed to provide £3·17 million for a continuation of the integrated rural development project.

Mr. McCrindle: In welcoming that package of measures, may I ask my right hon. Friend to update the House on the present state of negotiations between the IMF and the Zambian Government, and particularly on the degree of dependence of the Zambian economy on mining, because the fall in copper prices recently must clearly have had adverse effect?

Mr. Raison: I think it is well known that the major problem facing Zambia has been the fact that its economy in earlier years was heavily dependent on copper prices, which, of course, have fallen in recent years. That has helped produce its substantial problems. Zambia is making good progress in its discussions with the IMF, and I am glad to be able to support it.

Mr. Deakins: Does the Minister intend to help Zambian agriculture by making an appropriate contribution to the international fund for agricultural development?

Mr. Raison: I am glad to say that agreement has just been reached within IFAD. I have also just announced a new contribution to the integrated rural development programme in Zambia.

Mozambique

57. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further aid he proposes to make available to Mozambique.

Mr. Raison: As I told Mozambican Ministers on 28 January, I am making available to Mozambique additional capital aid of £6 million for developmental purposes and £1 million for emergency relief.

Mr. Soames: I note my right hon. Friend's answer. Will he tell the House what the existing aid programme is being spent on in Mozambique?

Mr. Raison: We are already providing £6·7 million for capital aid and £1·3 million for manpower aid. In addition a substantial amount of the money that we have pledged to the Southern African development co-ordination conference is also intended for use in Mozambique.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Will my right hon. Friend tell us the main topics of conversation with the President of Mozambique at the recent Southern African development co-ordination conference which he attended last week?

Mr. Raison: I attended that conference but the President of Mozambique did not, so I did not have any conversations with him. However, I did have conversations with his Foreign Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Transport. I told them about our new offer to their country. They were extremely pleased and we had very constructive discussions.

India

58. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to increase the allocation of funds to India for the coming 12 months.

Mr. Raison: I have no plans to do so, but India will remain by far the largest recipient of British bilateral aid.

Mr. Janner: I very much regret that there is not to be an increase in aid in view of the staggering scale of poverty and deprivation that exists in India. Will the Minister at least promise to match, by governmental funds, sums that are raised by non-governmental efforts in this country to try to aid specific projects, rural and otherwise, in India?

Mr. Raison: Our aid programme to India is very big indeed. We are the biggest bilateral donor, and in the next year we expect to spend £108 million. We are willing to take part in the joint funding of voluntary schemes, but the extent of our support far exceeds that provided by the voluntary sector, valuable though the latter is.

Bharat Aluminium Company, India

59. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report progress on the construction of the thermal power plant for Bharat Aluminium Company, India and the amount of aid provided by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Raison: Work on the project is well in hand for completion on schedule in June 1987. ODA is providing grant-aid of almost £132 million, of which £33 million comes under the aid and trade provision.

Mr. Chapman: I welcome the progress and the planned completion of the significant project within the next 18 months. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the project will not only bring immense benefit to Indians but will have a beneficial spin-off for British consultants working abroad and for British manufacturers? Is it not such significant and tangible projects that British overseas aid should be geared to and support?

Mr. Raison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The project is proceeding very successfully. It will mean a valuable contribution towards the Indian power programme and also provides many jobs for British industry.

Sudan

61. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of assistance being given by Her Majesty's Government for the transport of food in the Sudan.

Mr. Raison: The 100 vehicles that we provided for Save the Children Fund last year are now being used to distribute food within Darfur. The additional £5 million that I announced to the House on 13 January is earmarked for distribution costs within Darfur over the coming months. The aim is to position as much food as possible, particularly in the most remote areas, before the next rains. We are in constant touch with the other major donors and non-government agencies which are also involved in the relief operation.

Mr. Beith: Is it now the Minister's assessment that, with this assistance and the assistance coming from other sources, there will be no starvation arising directly from lack of transport within Sudan, or is he still anxious about the problem?

Mr. Raison: It would be foolish to produce a smug answer to that question. Progress will need to be watched carefully, but I believe that things are proceeding along the right lines.

Mr. Stuart Holland: During the previous Question Time on overseas development I referred to fuel for transport in Sudan. The Minister dismissed my concern as ridiculous. Will he withdraw that remark?

Mr. Raison: I do not believe that fuel itself is the major problem, but I accept that all aspects of transport must be watched closely. There is basically enough food in the Sudan, the problem is making sure that it can be purchased and distributed among the people who need it most.

Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference

62. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Southern African development co-ordination conference held in Harare on 30 to 31 January.

Mr. Raison: I attended the annual consultative meeting of the Southern Africa development co-ordination conference in Harare on 30 and 31 January. During the conference I made a new pledge of £10 million, mainly to be used for strengthening the regional transport link between Malawi and the port of Dar es Salaam. That sum is in addition to the £12 million that we have pledged at previous meetings.

Mr. Greenway: I welcome the aid for improving the infrastructure of the area, but can my right hon. Friend assure me that aid is going into projects that will help the economy to become self-supporting in due course?

Mr. Raison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is always a primary objective of our aid programme to help the economies concerned to strengthen, so that they can become more self-reliant.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the point of order immediately after——

Mr. Straw: My point of order arises directly out of questions.

Mr. Speaker: I know. That is why I shall take it immediately after Question Time.

British Leyland

3.32 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the future of British Leyland Vehicles and possible disposals.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Paul Channon): With the approval of the BL board, discussions are in progress between BL and General Motors with the aim of creating an internationally competitive United Kingdom commercial vehicle industry and improving the long-term prospects for the constituent BL companies. These talks cover Leyland Trucks, Land Rover, Freight Rover and certain related overseas operations. Discussions are at an advanced stage, but a number of important issues remain to be settled Separate discussions are taking place with the Laird Group, which owns Metro Cammell Weyman, about the future of Leyland Bus.

As to the other BL businesses, it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government to return them to private ownership as soon as practicable. Talks with other car manufacturers on a variety of potential business ventures are in progress; some of them are wide-ranging, but are at an exploratory stage, and it is too early to tell whether they will lead to any potential equity stake, acquisition or merger.

Mr. John Smith: The Secretary of State's statement reveals that discussions are at an advanced stage, but the House has not been told anything until today. Does not that statement confirm the fears expressed by the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), in a speech yesterday in Birmingham? Is it not appalling that the Government are willing even to contemplate the disposal of the largest part of the British truck and bus manufacturing industry to an American competitor? Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that his predecessor was forced to say on 23 October last year:

"after lengthy discussions, Vauxhall is not yet ready to go further in proving that it really is a British car producer."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1985; Vol. 84, c. 285.]

In that context, is it not naive and foolish to expect that company to preserve any British element in what it acquires? Is there no part of British industry that is safe from the destructive purposes of the Government? Is there nothing that is not for sale? Will the Secretary of State confirm that a team from General Motors is currently in Leyland compiling a detailed dossier of our business? As the purpose of General Motors in buying Leyland would be to buy a market share, or rather to buy out the British market share and get its hands on modern facilities, which have been provided on a publicly financed basis at a cost of £320 million in the recent investment programme, will there not be large job losses in Bedford as well as Leyland? What is the estimate of the number of jobs that will be lost in both Bedford and Leyland?

What will the future be for the Land Rover and the Range Rover? Will not the job lot disposal of these prestigious British products be seen at home and abroad as a dreadful and shameful British retreat? Is it not a sad day when the British Government can even think of such a thing? If this deal goes ahead, will it not be the case that the British armed forces will have almost no British owned suppliers of the vehicles upon which they depend?

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question, not a statement.

Mr. Smith: Can the Government explain why all other countries in western Europe seem to want to stay in this industry but the British Government do not? Can the Secretary of State say what protection there will be for independent British research and development? Is not this episode typical of the Government's industrial policy? It involves the destruction of jobs, the permanent loss of an industry, the loss of independent research and development and the surrender of crucial British interests.

Mr. Channon: No, Sir. I strongly repudiate many of the points that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has raised in his question. As I have already explained, no decision has been reached in the talks between British Leyland and General Motors. When firm conclusions are reached, I shall make a full statement to the House. Were a deal to be reached, General Motors would give full undertakings that the majority—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Channon: I am surprised that on an issue like this the Opposition are not anxious for me to be heard. I am trying to explain these important matters. After what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been saying, he should be crying, not laughing.

General Motors would be willing to give undertakings that the majority of the products sold by the businesses involved would be manufactured in the United Kingdom, that the products would continue to have a high local content, that there would be a substantial level of exports, that research and development facilities would be maintained and developed in the United Kingdom, that Land Rover would retain its distinct British identity, and that an appropriate level of investment would be injected into the business to achieve competitive future models and facilities.

If these talks were to come off, it would be the Government's aim to ensure that the jobs and the future of Land Rover and these other companies were more, not less, secure. That is what we are fighting for—not for some shibboleth, like the right hon. and learned Gentleman—to try to get a viable industry that will be secure for the future.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that private notice questions are an extension of question time.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new post. As General Motors and British Leyland are well established commercial vehicle manufacturers in this country, will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is Government policy to strengthen their manufacturing base? Will he remember that General Motors has a long, distinguished history of supplying first-class defence equipment to this country for this country's needs?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is right in the latter part of his question. He is also right in the first part of his question, and I very much welcome his support.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Is the Secretary of State aware of a recent early-day motion,

[Mr. George Park]

sponsored by Conservative Members, paying tribute to the efforts of the workers and management of British Leyland? Does he imagine that his announcement will encourage either the workers or the management to make great efforts when they know that the inevitable rationalisation will mean that their jobs are likely to go down the drain?

Mr. Channon: I believe that my announcement, and what may possibly take place, should be—I do not say that it will be—of comfort to the work force. They should realise that their future is likely to be secure in a motor industry and in a truck industry that will have secure futures. Over £2 billion has been pumped into British Leyland during the past few years. We need to ensure that this industry is able to function successfully in the foreseeable future.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I support the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), on the basis that General Motors is a successful company and that the merger could be to the benefit of British Leyland and it ill befits the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who turned up at Ellesmere Port in a Japanese car to talk to officials of the company, to talk of British content. General Motors has an excellent record in Britain, and I have every confidence that should the merger take place it will be to the benefit of all workers concerned.

Mr. John Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take it later, if I may.

Mr. Channon: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's support, and I am grateful to him for what he said.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that one of the duties that he has taken over is that of seeking to ensure that we have a viable British-owned motor industry? What has happened to the Government's philosophy of privatisation? Was it not intended to bring ownership to the employees and to the British people; not to sell off job lots in the American market?

Mr. Channon: I and my right hon. Friends are seeking to create conditions in which the companies about which I have been talking this afternoon will be able to have a more secure future than they have had in the past, and where their people will be able to look forward with confidence to the future of their companies. That is my aim. I would not allow talks to proceed unless I received satisfactory assurances to that effect, and I am sure that I will.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is in the the best interests of my constituents who work for Land Rover, the Austin Rover group and Unipart that the alternative to the suggestions that he has made may well be greater public investment, and that the exploration of the sort of co-operative venture that he has suggested would be beneficial to those constituents?

Mr. Channon: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Why does the right hon. Gentleman believe that it is so good for the employees that no talks have taken place with the trade unions? Indeed, it has been denied to the trade unions that talks are taking place. What does the right hon. Gentleman mean when he says that the majority of products will be manufactured here? What will be the effect on the component industry, particularly in view of General Motors' poor record on buying components in Britain? Will he confirm that the bus and coach division could go to the wall, with the loss of 1,000 jobs? Does it not prove that in relation to the manufacturing industry the Government are not bothered about running the estate but only with selling the valuables in the manor house?

Mr. Channon: No, Sir. It means no such thing. It means that we are trying to achieve a situation in which the employment prospects and wellbeing of those in the companies concerned will be better rather than worse in the future. If a deal with General Motors were to be reached—and that is by no means certain—I shall have to be satisfied on the point that the hon. Gentleman raised about the majority of the products. We shall need to have a proper understanding about them.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend, whom I welcome to his post, think that British shareholders might be interested in the Range Rover and Land Rover, and for the rest could there be a European solution?

Mr. Channon: That is an ingenious idea which my hon. Friend, with his ingenious mind, so typically puts forward. I am convinced that the proposals for Land Rover offer the best possible future, that it could have. It will have extra opportunities in the United States, and that is very much in the interests of Land Rover.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): What arrangements will the right hon. Gentleman make to consult those who work at British Leyland and Metro Cammell Weyman about their future before their jobs are sold off?

Mr. Channon: I do not accept the premise on which the hon. Gentleman concluded his question. As I have said, discussions are in progress. No decisions have been taken. The House will continue to be kept informed.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reality of the situation is that there is over-capacity in vehicle manufacturing in the world and that any sale will give the opportunity to broaden the narrow retail outlets, possibly to overseas markets? Will he confirm that manufacturing capacity will be part of the condition of any sale?

Mr. Channon: That is an important point, with which I agree.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is this not an example of the Government dropping the Union Flag and raising the Stars and Stripes once again over British industry? Is it not true that this American corporation has made it clear that it does not want the Leyland Bus division? If that is the case, what will be done with it? What is the future of the Leyland plant in my constituency?

Mr. Channon: As I told the House, separate discussions are taking place with the Laird group about the future of Leyland Bus. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that, rather than being so contemptuous about it.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend remember that the Labour party bitterly opposed the privatisation of Jaguar, which has been an outstanding success, not least for all the people who work in Jaguar? Does it not prove the Luddite attitude of the Opposition, because everybody knows that the future of the motor industry lies in international co-operation? If there is a possibility of a joint venture between British Leyland and a Japanese firm, would we not welcome that as well?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is entirely right, and it is typical of the Opposition today, as so often in the past, that they oppose any attempt to try to solve sensibly some of the serious commercial problems—attempts that are very much in the interest of all concerned.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): If the workers of Land Rover and Range Rover and the management said that they would prefer the Jaguar solution, would the Government stand in their way? Why did the Secretary answer yes to the question from the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills), who said that a better solution to that of the Secretary of State for the job security of the people of the Meriden constituency and others was more public investment?

Mr. Channon: I do not think that I said yes. I shall look at what I said, but I think that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood. *[Interruption.]* How interesting it is that when the affairs of a great industry such as this are being discussed the Opposition treat them with such frivolity. They are not interested in the future of British Leyland or its Trucks division. All that they are interested in is making petty mischief, as usual.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the future of scores, if not hundreds, of small businesses in the west midlands depends on their being able to provide parts to British Leyland? May we be certain that that future is being considered in any arrangement to be made?

Mr. Channon: I assure my hon. Friend that the point that she has raised is very much in my mind. I am grateful to her for referring to it again.

Mr. John Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of an intervention by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), which I fear could mislead people, I make it utterly clear that I own and drive a British car, and have never had nor driven a Japanese car.

Later—

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Bearing in mind the importance of the BL issue, why did we have such a very short time to ask questions about it? For the entire motor industry and all the people of the midlands, nothing is more important. We waste more time in the House on trivia than we spend on important matters such as this.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said at the beginning—the hon. Gentleman knows this well—that a private notice question is an extension of Question Time.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It is a disgrace.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not argue with me from the Floor.

Mr. John Carlisle: Further to an earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that I had said he owned a Japanese car. To correct the record, what I said was that he visited Ellesmere Port in a Japanese car. Perhaps he would like to clarify that — [HON MEMBERS: "Withdraw"].

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to the comments of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), may I stress that some of us whose constituents' work is affected by the disastrous statement that we have just had, at the first appearance at the Dispatch Box of the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, are entitled to have a chance to ask questions, and not have such a very brief period terminated when there were still many hon. Members on their feet?

Mr. Speaker: The House should understand that a Private notice question, which the Chair grants, is an extension of Question Time.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): It was a statement.

Mr. Speaker: It was not a statement.

Mr. Winnick: It should have been.

Mr. Speaker: That is a different matter. It was not a statement. I was asked whether I would grant a private notice question on this matter, and I did so. I think that the House has had a fair run on it. No doubt we shall return to the matter.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not the case that we have a very important debate to follow, which must end at 7 o'clock? Therefore, is it not right that we should pass to that debate as quickly as possible?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Questions to Ministers

3.47 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier, during Question Time, there was an important disclosure by the Attorney-General that both he and the Solicitor-General had been wholly kept in the dark by the Prime Minister about what she knew about the source of the leak——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As I understand it, this is an extension of the full 10 minutes that we had on this matter, during which the hon. Gentleman asked a question.

Mr. Straw: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. That is my point. Is it not outrageous and ludicrous that on such an important point the Attorney-General should be subject to only 10 minutes of questions each month? Will you confirm that it is within the rules of the House for you and the Government to agree to an extension of Question Time by placing such important questions to be answered after 3.30?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a question for me. If the Government or the Minister concerned wish to answer questions at the end of Question Time, that is in order. I judge that on this occasion the Attorney-General did not do that because he had Question 49 to answer.

Protection of Military Remains Bill

3.50 pm

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that on Friday last the Protection of Military Remains Bill was passed unanimously by the House. All its stages were passed unanimously, which is almost unique in the House. It is dismaying to see on the Order Paper today motion No. 4 in the name of the Leader of the House:

> That the Proceedings of 31st January in Committee and on Third Reading of the Protection of Military Remains Bill be null and void.

In effect, the Leader of the House is saying that a Bill, which was proposed by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), shall be null and void despite the decision of the House that it should pass all its stages without a single vote.

We know that the Government are anxious to get away from Westland to matters of national importance, but is this not carrying things a little too far? The Leader of the House is trying to get a motion passed, presumably without debate, which rescinds the unanimous decision of the House last Friday. It shows contempt towards the House, and I invite the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw the motion and allow the Bill to proceed.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I can help the House on this matter. The Bill passed all its stages without notice. Normally, as the House knows, Bills do not pass all their stages in one sitting. I understand that the Bill in question requires a money resolution, which was not on the Order Paper. It will be necessary to move that before the Bill can proceed.

Teachers (Pay and Responsibilities)

3.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the teachers' dispute, which has caused disruption of children's education for the past year.

The House will be aware that, with assistance from ACAS, a provisional agreement has been reached between management and teachers on a settlement for 1985, an end to disruption, and assisted negotiations across pay and other conditions of service for 1986. The Government greatly welcome the prospect of a firm agreement of this kind along with the restoration of normal working in the schools. The disruption has not only damaged children's education. It has put heavy burdens on parents, head teachers and on many classroom teachers. We all want to see it end. I hope therefore that the provisional agreement will soon be formally adopted by management and teachers.

The NUT is not at present party to this agreement. I nevertheless hope that all the teachers' unions will join in the negotiations that lie ahead for 1986. The Government accept the case for an increase in teachers' pay to recruit, retain and motivate the teachers needed for the high quality school education our children need and deserve, along with improvements in the pay structure and a clarification of teachers' responsibilities. The Government have set aside additional resources for this purpose. I therefore hope that the forthcoming negotiations will soon make sufficient progress towards the Government's objectives to justify my releasing those resources.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that he and his Department did, and have done, nothing to help bring about a settlement of this highly-damaging teachers' dispute, and that his statement today does nothing to make a long-term settlement of the teachers' grievance more likely?

Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman has not offered the local education authorities any extra money to help pay for the provisional settlement, nor has he offered to increase the Government's contribution towards a longer term settlement next year?

When will the right hon. Gentleman grasp the simple truth — a truth that is well understood by local authorities, parents and teachers alike — that raising educational standards and giving teachers decent salaries requires substantial extra investment?

Does the Secretary of State understand that his announcement that he will not be standing at the next election has transformed him overnight into the lamest of lame ducks? If he really cares about our children's education he should announce that he is resigning as Secretary of State.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government have long taken the view—a view that we have every reason to confirm —that teachers deserve to have more pay in order that people of the right quality shall be recruited, retained and motivated. The Government have accepted that. We also believe that it would not be right for additional money to be given to teachers from the taxpayer without, at the same time, the teachers agreeing to a new pay structure with ample extra promotions and to implementing their duties.

The House is united in wanting an end to the disruption in our schools. There is, however, a difference between the Government and the Opposition which I must emphasise. The Government see a bargain for children in calling for extra pay and a new pay structure for teachers, but we also believe that there should be an acceptance by the teachers' unions of duties. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) is active in seeking extra pay for teachers, and I can understand that. However, he completely refuses to accept that teachers, for their part, should accept duties. When he was asked that in a recent debate, he refused to confirm that it was the Opposition's view that duties are a necessary part of the bargain.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): If there is to be a complete resolution of the dispute, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that rank and file teachers should be persuaded to accept the outline of the ACAS agreement? Is it not therefore most important that, to persuade them, the Government should make it clear what benefits are on offer in the later negotiation for 1986 onwards? Those possibilities might be enhanced before negotiation begins.

Sir Keith Joseph: I accept what my hon. Friend said. It is important that teachers in unions should well understand what is on offer and that the Government have already set aside a substantial sum of money to be released on condition that the bargain to which I have referred is made. The Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association has already called off the disruption. I welcome that, as I am sure the House does. The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers is balloting its members. We understand that the ballot will take much of this month. I hope that the National Union of Teachers, which has called off the strike on which it provisionally decided, will decide to call off the disruption which it proposes at the moment to continue.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): The Secretary of State said that he would make sufficient progress towards the Government's objectives. Will he confirm that those objectives are the same as those that he spelt out to the House previously? Does he accept that the more intransigent he is, the more succour he gives to the hard-line unionists? I wonder whether he read today's leader in the *Daily Mail* which finishes:

"The Cabinet should empower Sir Keith to give a kindly—and astutely kind smile—(cash to follow) before he finally bows out."

Perhaps he would like to manifest that.

Sir Keith Joseph: If we had not been firm and said that extra pay for teachers from the taxpayer would be forthcoming only if, in return, they accepted their duties, a new pay structure and extra promotions, we would not by now even have a discussion of that bargain on the agenda.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I join my right hon. Friend in deploring the damage that has been done to our children's education by this long dispute. Does he agree that we must somehow find a way of encouraging those moderate and conscientious teachers who intensely dislike the strike weapon and who, in many cases, have rejected it? Can we not in the longer term move towards some kind of professional teachers' council, and hope that we can move towards negotiating a no-strike agreement?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with my hon. Friend and pay tribute to all those teachers, in particular head teachers, who have carried on without disruption. I am ready to support the idea of a general teachers' council, if that is the wish of the majority of teachers, but I should need first to be convinced that it would operate on behalf of the children as well as taking an interest in teachers.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): In his statement, the Secretary of State used the words, "normal work in schools". Do I take it that he was referring to the time before the teachers' dispute arose when teachers performed many out-of-school activities including taking children for Saturday morning football matches and that type of thing? The feeling that I receive in my constituency and beyond is that in the foreseeable future—certainly not in the Secretary of State's lifetime—teachers will not go back to normal working in schools. Even if there is a settlement, normal working in schools, as we recognised it before the dispute, will not return. Teachers are resisting the demands for out-of-school activities made upon them.

Sir Keith Joseph: The answer to the hon. Gentleman is yes, except that the Government are now separately financing midday supervision, as he and the House are aware, and we are asking that that appraisal be considered as part of the duties.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the majority of teacher unions such as the AMMA and the NAS/UWT are prepared to talk about restructuring, conditions and appraisal, whereas the impression is given that they are not? Does he agree that the ACAS panel, which has been established, should become a son of Burnham — an embryo negotiating body?

Sir Keith Joseph: I welcome what I know is the correct attitude of a number of unions. Burnham is needed under the law to validate and implement any agreement made under the ACAS umbrella.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that education requires a degree of consent and confidence before any learning can take place? Was it not his responsibility and duty to separate the issues that he mentioned earlier so that there was not the disruption that has taken place, and to ensure that discussion went forward on two different levels to avoid the disaster that we have just experienced?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first proposition, but I do not think that the blame for the teacher unions' reluctance to discuss pay and what pay is for falls upon the Government.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that everyone is pleased to see teachers paid more? Does he accept that, unfortunately, the strike that we have seen over the past year has been the tip of the iceberg and that there has been serious disruption in schools for the past three years, with books not marked, work not prepared, parent-teacher evenings and evening interviews with parents not held? Will he do all that he can to ensure that the forthcoming discussions under the ACAS umbrella will ensure a full return to proper duty by all teachers so that children once more have the proper education that they deserve?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, Sir. It is to avoid a repetition of the experience of the past three years that the Government attach such importance to the acceptance by the teacher unions of their duties in return for additional pay and a revised pay structure.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the Secretary of State recall an earlier reference to moderate and conscientious teachers? Does he recognise that even the most moderate and conscientious teacher perceives that the damage which has been done to British education during the past year or two is greater than anything it has ever experienced? Is he aware that that damage will not be relieved, if he was accurately reported following the settlement by the suggestion that the Government would not find the money to pay for any improvements? Will he make it absolutely clear that the Government will find the money or local authorities, whether they be Labour or Conservative-controlled, will all be found to be in default by the Secretary of State for the Environment?

Sir Keith Joseph: Such an inaccurate quotation is beneath the hon. Gentleman's normal standing. I never said any such thing. I repeated what the local education authorities have said the whole time, that to honour the agreement that they have now made would strain their resources a great deal.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on making it clear that the Government are ready to negotiate on the excellent ideas produced by ACAS. Will he make it his prime duty to publicise the fact that from 1 April 1986 a new teacher will get at least £7,037 and that a teacher on the top of graduate entrant scale 3 will get £11,969? Is that not a commitment to the teaching profession, and does it not show that the Government put the children first?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with much that my hon. Friend said. To confirm the attitude that I am seeking to express, I should like to quote one sentence from a letter that I wrote to the chairman of the employers' panel and released to the press:

"the Government is only too eager to be able to justify such extra spending on teachers' pay and better rewards for effective teaching, in return for an acceptable bargain with the teachers on pay structure and on duties."

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Have not the Government a cheek to be telling the teachers that they cannot have proper pay deals when the same Government voted through 19 per cent. for top salaries and in 1985 nodded through an average 17 per cent. wage increase for those in business management and top executives? The same Government keep referring to co-operation with regard to the teachers, but they refuse to co-operate with House Committees and instead plead the fifth amendment. They have ex-Ministers who will not tell the truth, and yet they are asking——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This has nothing to do with the statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: It is on the same perception of the need to recruit, retain and motivate people of the right quality that the Government agreed with the recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body and they have made available to teachers an extra £1·25 billion in return for them doing their duties.

Mr. Speaker: May I remind the House, as the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) has done, that we have an important debate following this statement, and I also have notice of two Standing Order No. 10 applications. I shall allow questions to continue for a further five minutes and I hope I shall be able to call most of the hon. Members who are now standing if they ask brief questions.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who have advocated a review body and who still believe in one nevertheless believe that an honourable settlement has been negotiated by ACAS? It will not be understood by parents if disruption does not cease forthwith.

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree very much.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I shall not consider myself a lame duck for the rest of this Parliament and therefore I see no reason why he should? If this settlement is decided by Burnham and most of the teachers' unions therefore accept it—it would presumably be imposed after that—is there any reason why members of other teachers' unions should not withdraw their support for the NUT, which will be the only body opposing it? After the new Burnham decision the NUT could not justify opposing the agreement.

Sir Keith Joseph: I very much hope that the NUT executive and its members will change their attitude.

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this agreement could have been reached last year when he first offered an extra £1·25 billion if at that stage the NUT had not still had a majority on the Burnham committee? It is only because the NUT lost that majority that this progress has become possible. They lost that majority because teachers voted with their feet for a more moderate approach to the settlement and to take up the olive branch which my right hon. Friend had offered.

Sir Keith Joseph: It might have been possible to provide extra money from the taxpayer had there been a with-strings agreement for 1985-86 instead of a no-strings agreement. That prospect was wrecked when the NUT walked out of the negotiations in December 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): I welcome the settlement so far, but will my right hon. Friend constantly re-emphasise the importance of restructuring to any long-term solution to the teaching profession's pay and conditions problem? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are willing to fund the increased costs of such restructuring, and will he recognise the difficulties of the local education authorities in the interim of funding a proper settlement?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree about the importance of restructuring. The Government had provided, on condition, the extra money which would have enabled substantial restructuring and no fewer than 74,000 extra promotions, had the offer put forward by the employers in September last year, on the basis of the Government's extra money from the taxpayer, been accepted and not rejected.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the concluding remarks of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) are regarded by Conservative Members as deplorable? There is great respect on this side of the House and in the country for what my right hon. Friend has set out to do as Secretary of State. Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is widespread support in Britain for his insistence that the Government will not underwrite a new pay settlement to teachers until such time as their unions are willing to accept a proper professional contract which includes forswearing the disruption of schools now and in the future?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree with him. I am genuinely surprised that the hon. Member for Durham, North allows himself to reject the idea of the duties of teachers as part of the bargain.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Will my right hon. Friend accept that his term of office has been characterised by a genuine desire to improve standards in our schools? Does my right hon. Friend not agree that in the light of the ACAS proposals the time has come to stop disruption in our schools especially in marginal constituencies such as mine—*[Interruption.]* The NUT quite deliberately targeted marginal seats. Is this not a generous offer and is it not time that it was accepted?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am rather shocked that Opposition Members laugh so heartily at the penalisation of children in the schools. Surely it is not part of the philosophy of the traditional Labour party to take it out on children?

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that, like many other hon. Members in their constituencies, I have had numerous letters from parents in mine? They do not think a great deal of the Secretary of State for Education. Is he also aware that not long ago I accused him of messing up social services and messing up industry. Now he has messed up education. I am pleased that he is going at the end of this Parliament, and I hope he will not interfere in the future with the education services.

Sir Keith Joseph: I feel, despite the hon. Gentleman's point of view, that most people in this House desperately want better education for our children. That calls for the acceptance by teachers of their duties as well as a review of the career structure.

Draft Single European Act

4.16 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Draft Single European Act final text."

I emphasise "final text".

On 18 December, when my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) was discussing the European treaty with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Secretary of State said:

"It was agreed that we should not speak of the establishment of a European union."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1985; Vol. 89, c. 302.]

The first paragraph of the preamble to this treaty gives a commitment

"to transform relations as a whole among their States into a European Union, . . . to implement this European Union . . . and to invest this union with the necessary means of action".

In 1973 we joined the Common Market. At a later stage we had a referendum to sustain membership of the Common Market. The British people have never been asked whether they wish to be dragged unknowingly, unconsulted and unconsenting into a United States of Europe. This text is final and would mean that the United Kingdom would cease to be a sovereign state and would be merely a province of a larger United States of Europe. It is an important issue.

Secondly, as in important issue, it states in this final text that we are

"convinced that the European idea . . . and the need for new developments correspond to the wishes of the democratic peoples of Europe, for whom the European Parliament, elected by universal sufferage, is an indispensable means of expression,"

This is bunk. If, Mr. Speaker, you speak to your constituents, or if I speak to mine, or if one looks at the figures of those who voted for this institution at the last election, there is no doubt that it is bunk. It is not only bunk, because if one looks at article 6 one sees that this dangerous institution is about to be given yet more power.

Throughout the treaty we have talked about the European Assembly. Now, in article 6, we read that "After consulting the Assembly" is to be changed to "in co-operation with the European Parliament". I am not sure what the language means, but I think that a Parliament is different from an assembly, and that co-operation is different from consultation. In this treaty this institution is to be given a great deal of power. As political power and parliamentary power is by and large a zero sum, if more power goes to Strasbourg and Brussels there will be less power here in this Parliament.

This is a matter of such fundamental importance that there is a risk that as a result of this Denmark will feel forced to secede from the European Community. It is urgent because the next business of the House is to consider giving parliamentary approval to an illegal budget passed by the European Assembly. It seems to me that it is the wrong way round for the Government to wish to give money to this bandit institution. Surely we should first discuss in Parliament whether we wish to give more powers to this institution.

As a matter of great urgency the Government have said that they must provide the extra money because they are taking the case to the European Court of Justice. The European Court of Justice is not only about justice; it is also about the increase of power of European institutions. If the Government first provide more money through Parliament and then say that they want the institution to have more power, and Parliament does not even see fit to discuss that increase in power, what is the outcome likely to be at the European Court?

You are a wise and powerful Speaker, Mr. Speaker. You are here, not to support the Government or their programme, but to support the sovereignty of the House. I implore you to grant leave for this urgent debate to take place.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the Draft Single European Act final text."

I have listened with great care to what the hon. Member has said. As he knows, my sole duty when considering an application under Standing Order No. 10 is to decide whether it should be given priority over the business already set down for this evening or for tomorrow. I regret that I cannot find that this matter meets all of the criteria laid down in the Standing Order, and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House, but he will of course have an opportunity to discuss it later today.

Police Federation of Northern Ireland

4.21 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the restriction on the right of free speech imposed on the Police Federation of Northern Ireland."

The matter is specific, in that the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland has tried to gag the elected chairman of the Police Federation of Northern Ireland by issuing a force order cancelling regulation 35 of the Royal Ulster Constabulary discipline code.

Regulation 35 reads:

"Nothing in these regulations will preclude the spokesman of any of the constituent sections of the Police association for Northern Ireland making or issuing any statement to the news media concerning the welfare and efficiency of their members."

Last week, the assistant chief constable, acting on the Chief Constable's instruction, handed to the chairman of the Police Federation a paper, of which I have a copy, saying that regulation 35, which establishes beyond peradventure the right of the federation to speak out on any matter which the House has made its business, had been amended thus:

"Statements and interviews and the publication of articles in any journal or periodical concerning matters of general Force policy and actions, or expressions of opinion on police problems or duties are not permitted without the express consent and approval of the Chief Constable . . . Where any aspect of welfare or efficiency may relate to Force policy or actions, police problems or duties, the Chief Constable shall be consulted and approval obtained, before any statement is made or any article published."

Those words have no meaning other than that the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland intended, and intends to prevent the federation from making any comment in public which he has not specifically approved in advance. This is not only censorship. It is, and is meant to be, a gag.

During the weekend, the Chief Constable went further. He withdrew the amendment that I have just quoted and substituted for it his force order cancelling regulation 35 —the federation's free speech regulation—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not use arguments which he might use if the application were granted.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: I am obliged, Mr. Speaker. I merely wanted to say that the matter is specific because the force order contains the words:

"Regulation 35 is cancelled".

The matter is also urgent because, if the Chief Constable's force order is allowed to stand, not only is free speech denied, but when the chairman of the Police Federation meets the press on Wednesday or Thursday his superior officer will have no choice but to charge him with a disciplinary offence. That is why it is urgent for this matter to be dealt with.

The matter is important, too, for the Chief Constable's action in Ulster could pose a threat to the free speech of the Police Federations of England and Wales and of Scotland as well as that of Northern Ireland. The federations on this side of the water will go to the aid of their Northern Ireland colleagues if this oppressive order is not withdrawn.

I therefore invite you, Mr. Speaker, to allow the House to debate this matter as it touches on one of our most fundamental rights—that of free speech—and strikes at the heart of the morale of 8,000 brave men and women who make up the Police Federation of Northern Ireland.

The matter is specific, urgent and important. I beg to ask that leave be given for it to take precedence over other business.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the restriction on the right of free speech imposed on the Police Federation of Northern Ireland."

The hon. Gentleman has raised a very important matter and I have listened with great care to what he has said. However, I have to give him the same answer as I gave to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow). I regret that I cannot find that the matter that he has raised meets all of the criteria laid down in the Standing Order, and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House. No doubt he will be able to find other ways in which to bring the matter before the House.

Supplementary Estimates

Class II, Vote 9

European Community Budget

[Relevant documents: The Draft General Budget of the European Communities for the Financial Year 1986, with amendments and proposed modifications (Documents Nos. 10773/85 to 10778/85), together with the Treasury's Explanatory Memorandum thereon; and the Seventh Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation, House of Commons Paper (1985-86) No. 21-vii, paragraph 9.

Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on 30 January 1986, House of Commons Paper No. 203-i.]

4.26 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): I beg to move,

That a supplementary sum, not exceeding £135,917,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 March 1986 for expenditure by the Treasury in connection with payments to the Budget of the European Communities not covered by direct charges on the Consolidated Fund under section 2(3) of the European Communities Act 1972, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 177.

The special Supplementary Estimate which is before the House today relates to our contributions to the 1985 and 1986 budgets of the European Communities. There are two relevant documents, apart from the Estimate, of which Members will wish to be aware — a memorandum submitted by the Treasury to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on 24 January, and a transcript of oral evidence taken by the Committee on 30 January.

I hope that it will be helpful to hon. Members if I first remind the House of the purpose and content of the Special Supplentary Estimate. I propose then to discuss the Government's policy on the disputed 1986 Community budget and our contributions towards it, and finally to say something about the statutory basis for our contribution to the disputed budget and the procedures for obtaining parliamentary approval.

The Estimate contains two elements. The larger concerns the provision of some £118 million towards meeting a Commission request to member states to bring forward a payment of traditional own resources — agricultural levies and customs duties—from December to November 1985. I should stress that this sum does not represent an increase in Community spending. It is purely a question of the timing of the payment of own resources collected during October 1985. They would normally have been paid to the Commission in December, but instead they were paid on 20 November. Our December payment was reduced by a corresponding amount and there was therefore no effect on the public expenditure planning totals.

The need for the November advance arose because one element in the financing of the 1985 budget — supplementary contributions under the 1985 intergovernmental agreement — was not received before the very end of 1985. We had taken provision of £820 million in Main Estimates and Summer Supplementaries to cover these advances during 1985, but had not expected them to continue to be required as late as November. Consequently, when the Commission asked member states to bring forward the £134 million December contribution into November, only £16·1 million could be covered by the amount remaining in the Vote. The balance of £118 million was paid by means of a drawing on the Contingencies Fund. Parliament was duly informed of the advance payment on 21 November. The Supplementary Estimate now proposed is needed to reimburse the Contingencies Fund before the end of the current financial year. The Commission's cash flow difficulties caused by late payment of the 1985 IGA have now been resolved. There should therefore be no need for further advance payments of traditional own resources in the immediate future.

The second part of the Estimate relates to the disputed 1986 budget. It seeks provision of £18 million in respect of our contributions during the first quarter of the year towards that part of the budget added by the European Parliament in excess of its powers under the treaties.

As hon. Members will recall, the European Parliament adopted in December a budget for 1986 which made provision for some 629 million ecu—about £400 million —of spending above that agreed by the Council. The Government have decided to join the Council and several other member states in asking the European Court to annul the disputed elements in the budget. In the meantime, the Government propose, in common with all other member states, to pay in full to the budget on a without prejudice basis. Since, however, we do not accept any legal obligation to contribute towards the disputed elements, this element in our contribution cannot be charged direct to the Consolidated Fund under the European Communities Act 1972 and we need instead to seek Parliament's authority through the Estimates procedure.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Can my hon. Friend say how much money Denmark is having to pay and when it is arranging to pay it? Can he also tell the House how it is that the Commission is applying this illegal budget at this stage?

Mr. Brooke: Denmark is necessarily paying a smaller amount than we are, but it has decided to pay in full. In a moment I shall discuss the Commission's action in bringing forward the budget and asking for payment.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): What provision exists under EEC legislation, laws and treaties for those amounts to be repaid if we win our court case?

Mr. Brooke: The circumstances that will obtain when the court gives judgment on the case are a matter which I shall discuss later. It is perfectly proper that the hon. Gentleman should raise it.

I shall discuss now the Government's policy on the disputed budget for 1986. The Government take an extremely serious view of what has happened during the 1986 budget process. The two main issues are budget discipline and treaty violation.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Gentleman must be aware of the fact that today in London 48 Liverpool Labour councillors are facing the courts because of a so-called illegal budget. If the decision goes against them——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I believe that the hon. Member is referring to a matter that is sub judice. Can he assure me that it is not sub judice?

Mr. Heffer: I am making an analogy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If they are found guilty—I am not arguing for or against them — they will be surcharged and disqualified. If the Government win the case, will they not only ask for the money back, but suggest that the MEPs who have raised the budget should be surcharged and disqualified from holding office?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would not be appropriate for the Minister to pursue that matter. In the House, it is not in order to refer to a case that is sub judice. I am informed that the case is sub judice.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not referring to the case. I am merely pointing out that the councillors are now before the courts. I am not saying whether they are right or wrong. I am not arguing their case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I said that it was not in order to refer to a case that was sub judice. This case is sub judice and must not be referred to.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Heffer: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If it is wrong for me to refer to the Liverpool case, is it not wrong for the Government to argue about something that is also sub judice, because it is before the courts?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is confusing two matters.

Mr. Heffer: I am not confusing anything—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House will like to know that the sub judice rule applies to United Kingdom courts, not to European courts.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have said that the case is before the European courts and cannot be subjected to the same sub judice rule as applies to a British court. When we went into the Common Market—dragged in without a vote, and some of us have been protesting ever since —we were told, without reservation, that in those areas where United Kingdom laws conflicted with European laws, the Common Market laws would supersede our laws. The Minister is telling us that the case is before the courts, which means that it is sub judice. We know that we cannot talk about Liverpool and Lambeth because you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have said that those cases are sub judice. On that count, it seems to me that the whole debate and the application for a Supplementary Estimate must be abandoned, because we are not allowed to talk about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is raising a point that can legitimately be raised during the debate. I am explaining the sub judice rule which applies in this place. It applies to United Kingdom courts, not to European courts. If the House wishes to change the rule, it knows how to attempt to change it. I am stating only the present position. It is my job in the Chair to ensure that our rules are upheld.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House is being asked to pass an illegal Act. The Government—thank God—with the other Governments, are to fight it through the Euro-court. If the Euro-court finds against us we can be forced to pay money, and the European Parliament will thus override the sovereignty of the House. How can that not be sub judice? How can we pay money—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is raising points which it would be perfectly legitimate to raise in the debate. I remind the House that the debate must finish at 7 o'clock. There are many hon. Members who wish to speak.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you would explain the sub judice rule further to the House, because there is a distinction between drawing attention to the fact that proceedings are taking place and commenting upon the substance of those proceedings. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) was merely pointing out that proceedings were under way. He was not offering an opinion on whether they were justified, but was simply saying that proceedings are taking place. The purpose of the sub judice rule is to prevent legal proceedings from being affected by what might be said in the House. The hon. Gentleman was not offering a comment on the legal proceedings. He was drawing an analogy, and to draw the analogy he pointed out their existence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One of the reasons for the sub judice rule is to ensure that cases are not prejudiced by anything that is said in the House. Drawing them into an argument could easily prejudice a case. That is why the House, in its wisdom, has had the rule for a great many years.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for coming in—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—on the point of order. I apologise also to my hon. Friend the Minister. Surely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, your ruling is bound to be right, because the case to which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) referred is a domestic case involving individuals. By implication, in raising that matter the hon. Gentleman is perhaps a little sympathetic towards those individuals. My hon. Friend the Minister is referring to an international case, where the debate technically revolves around the payment of a supplementary additional amount, rather than around the underlying arguments, although they will form part of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his comments. I hope that we can now continue with the debate.

Mr. Brooke: The two main issues are budget discipline and treaty violation.

On budget discipline, the Government first expressed their concern at the Council's "Second Reading" discussion on 26 and 27 November. On that occasion the Council voted by qualified majority to increase non-obligatory expenditure by some 1·2 billion ecu on payment appropriations. In the Government's view, it would have been compatible with the spirit of the budget discipline agreement to increase non-obligatory expenditure by some 1 billion ecu, comprising 440 million ecu permitted under the statutory maximum rate of increase for this expenditure

[Mr. Brooke]

plus some 550 million to 600 million ecu earmarked for Spain and Portugal in the first year of the enlarged Community. The 1·2 billion ecu voted by the Council somewhat exceeded this figure. The United Kingdom therefore voted against the Council's "Second Reading" budget as representing a threat to budget discipline. We did not, however, regard it as a flagrant violation. The non-obligatory expenditure totals exceeded budget discipline levels, strictly interpreted, but the excess was more than offset by the new own resources — net of refunds—which Spain and Portugal will be bringing to the budget.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): When we agreed to increase the level of our VAT contribution to the Community, it was pledged in return that we would get budget discipline. Is my hon. Friend saying that even if we win the case against the European Assembly the Council's "Second Reading" budget will still be in breach of those undertakings?

Mr. Brooke: I repeat that the non-obligatory expenditure totals exceeded budget discipline levels, strictly interpreted, but the excess was more than offset by the new own resources—net of refunds—which Spain and Portugal will be bringing to the budget.

At the December Budget Council the Council decided, with the United Kingdom again voting against, to offer a further 242 million ecu of non-obligatory expenditure in an attempt to reach agreement with the Parliament. The Parliament rejected the offer, which the President of the Council then withdrew, and took instead the regrettable step of voting and then adopting a budget providing for non-obligatory expenditure at a level 629 million ecu above the Council's "Second Reading".

The budget as adopted by the Parliament is clearly incompatible with the Council's budget discipline conclusions on non-obligatory expenditure. It does not follow that budget discipline as a whole lies in ruins. The single most important element in the budget discipline agreement is the guideline for expenditure on agricultural market support, and the budget as proposed by the Council and adopted by the Parliament respects that guideline. There is headroom of some 170 million ecu within it. The problem area is non-obligatory expenditure. That is where the Parliament's action, and to a lesser extent the Council's December offer, were manifestly incompatible with the budget discipline agreement.

The breach of budget discipline is a serious matter. To be fair, however, the Parliament has never subscribed to the Council's conclusions on budget discipline and is not legally bound by them. What is even more serious, therefore, is that the Parliament exceeded its powers by adopting a budget for 1986 with levels of non-obligatory expenditure going well beyond what was available under the treaty. The treaty provides that, if the statutory maximum rate of increase in non-obligatory expenditure is to be exceeded by more than the Parliament's statutory margin of manoeuvre, the Council and the Parliament must agree on a new maximum rate. In the event, the Parliament unilaterally adopted a budget which included a level of non-obligatory expenditure for which the Council's agreement had been neither sought nor obtained.

In the Government's view, the Parliament cannot be allowed to get away with this. If it were, there would, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has put it, be a substantial shift of real power in the Community. The balance of budgetary power between the Council and the Parliament would shift markedly in the Parliament's favour. The Parliament would be able to add substantial sums with impunity each year to the Council's proposals. These implications for future control of the Community's expenditure are even more serious than the amount of some 629 million ecu which is immediately at issue in the current year.

The Government have acted swiftly in response to the Parliament's action. We have taken three steps. First, we urged the Council to bring a case against the Parliament before the European Court under article 173 of the EEC treaty. This the Council agreed to do, by a seven to three majority, on 20 December — a bare day after confirmation of the decision by the President of the Parliament to adopt the budget. The Council's legal services are expected to deposit pleadings with the European Court in the middle of this month.

Secondly, we have ourselves initiated a case against the Parliament before the European Court, alongside the Council's case. Our application to the court was completed on 28 January and deposited on 29 January. The pleadings cannot be published, but have been made available to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. Copies have also been placed in the Library of the House for Members' use.

The Government's decision to bring separate national proceedings alongside the council's case was influenced by three main considerations: first, the need to insure againt the slight risk that the Council's case might be found inadmissible because of the wording of the relevant treaty provisions; secondly, the need to insure against the risk that the majority in the Council in favour of the court action might at some stage be lost; and, thirdly, our ability to deploy in our own case legal arguments which we believe to be most compelling. Four other member states are likewise bringing national cases—France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

The substance of our case is that the Parliament acted unlawfully by adopting payment and commitment appropriations which failed to respect the maximum rate provisions of the treaty, and also by including unauthorised appropriations for certain items of obligatory expenditure over which the Council has the last word. We are asking the court accordingly to annul the 1986 budget as adopted in so far as it exceeds the Council's own "Second Reading" budget of 26 and 27 November.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): My point concerns the action taken by the British Government, quite apart from the actions initiated by the Council and by other member states on the use of this money. Is there not a danger that the Commission will have spent the £18 million in this Supplementary Estimate before our interim measure comes before the court? Would not the best way of preventing the Commission from spending the money be for us not to pay the money? How will the Commission pay the money back if it has already spent it?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend has put his finger on the point. We have announced that we will take that interim measure before the court. We are bringing the interim measure before the court for a number of reasons which are not simply associated with the immediate payments.

We are concerned to place the application before the European Court. This is a novel action in the Community's history. We are concerned that the case should be considered at the earliest possibility. As I said to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, if the Commission has spent the money when the court makes its decision on the final case, by definition, the money has been spent. However, a most important battle will have been won in terms of establishing the distribution of power between the Parliament and the Council. If, on any future occasion, Parliament sought to do the same thing, an interim application would immediately become admissible and be decided on the precedent of the previous case.

Mr. Marlow: Can my hon. Friend estimate how long the legal proceedings will take? How much money above the legal budget which my hon. Friend would support is likely to be spent in that time? If it is within the same financial year, why on earth can we not have the money back from the Commission?

Mr. Brooke: On the timing of the main court action, it is unlikely that we will obtain a judgment much before the end of the year, and it could be some time well into the next calendar year. On my hon. Friend's specific question, by definition the sum involved will be £72 million, contingent upon the relative exchange rate at the time.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Brooke: I am anxious that hon. Members should have an opportunity to speak in the debate.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): This is an important point, especially in view of the possible year's gap. Is the Minister saying that the Commission, its President or an official statement has suggested that despite the matter being sub judice—at least in EEC terms—the Commission will nevertheless go ahead and pay out the money before the court makes a decision? Who made that statement, and on what authority?

Mr. Brooke: The Commission has presented its demand to the United Kingdom for payment, and that is the subject of today's debate. It is on that ground that we intend to move our interim application that the demand is inappropriate in terms of the margin. Once the demand payment is paid, the resources can be spent under the Commission's powers. Failing our first request to the court, we are asking it to annul the budget in its entirety; in other words, to find that no valid budget exists.

Our third action is to ask the court for an interim order in effect suspending implementation of the illegal elements in the budget until the court has given judgment. We shall be applying for this order within the next week or so. Our application will ask the court to suspend implementation both of the excesses of expenditure in the budget above the Council's "Second Reading" levels and of the extra contributions required to finance these excesses. Our advice is that the court is unlikely to reach judgment on the substantive cases before the end of this year, or quite possibly later. In our view, this reinforces the case for requesting an interim order, on which we would expect the court to decide within a few weeks. Other member states are likewise considering whether to request interim orders, but we are the only country to have decided firmly to do so.

The other policy issue which the Government have had to address is how much the United Kingdom should pay towards the disputed budget in the meantime, pending rulings by the European Court. The Government have decided, after careful consideration, that the best course is to pay in full towards the budget as adopted, on a without prejudice basis, pending the court's rulings. That is why we decided to present the special Supplementary Estimate.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I am trying to follow the logic behind my hon. Friend's argument. I simply cannot understand how we can pay money on a without prejudice basis, which will then be spent and become unrecoverable. I cannot understand why my hon. Friend cannot defer that payment until the interim decision of the court.

Mr. Brooke: If my hon. Friend will be patient, I shall come to that part of the argument.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): In the event of the Commission spending the money illegally, will it be open to us to deduct that amount from a future budget payment?

Mr. Brooke: There would be freedom for us to deduct that amount from a subsequent contribution. However, obviously that would be contingent upon the decision of the court in responding to our interim application.

The first and most important consideration is that the Council and individual member states must win the court cases if a major shift in power towards the European Parliament is to be avoided. The Government's legal advice has been that payment in full would enable the United Kingdom to appear before the European Court in the best possible posture. On the other hand, failure to pay in full would impair the United Kingdom's posture and tend to prejudice the substantive cases brought before the court and, still more, the United Kingdom's application for an interim order.

A second important consideration is that all other member states have decided to pay in full. We ought not lightly to break ranks with the rest of the Council.

A third consideration is that the United Kingdom would incur a potential liability to penal interest charges——

Mr. Budgen: When my hon. Friend gave evidence before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee last week he said that the sole reason for paying the money was that the legal advice to the Government was that they should do so. He said that he would make available further details of that legal advice. When it was suggested that the payment was being made because the Government wished to appear Communautaire, my hon. Friend returned to the argument that it was being done on legal advice. Will he please explain in detail the basis of the legal advice?

Mr. Brooke: I repeat what I said a moment ago, that failure to pay in full would prejudice the United Kingdom's posture, and still more the United Kingdom's application for an interim order — [SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] Because there would be a degree of illogicality in asking the Commission to cease to insist on a payment from us if we were not in fact making that payment.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the whole of this case seems to hang on legal advice, is there any way in which the House, before it

[Mr. Marlow]

decides on the matter at 7 o'clock, can have the benefit of the presence of the Attorney-General so that we can ask him questions?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter of argument, and is not a matter for me.

Mr. Brooke: As I was saying, a third consideration was that the United Kingdom would incur a potential liability to penal interest charges on delayed payments if we failed to pay in full. The penal rate is currently nearly 21 per cent., and rises with each month of delay.

It may be helpful to my hon. Friends if I expand a little on the legal background. Although the Government have been advised that they are not legally obliged to contribute to the disputed part of the 1986 budget, there is a contrary view — which we understand to be held by the Commission, among others — that the budget must be treated as valid unless and until it is annulled by the court. If the Government refused to contribute to the adopted budget in full, they would almost certainly be challenged by the Commission. Indeed, it is possible that the Commission could ask for an interim order against the United Kingdom. If, at the end of the day, it was held that the United Kingdom should have contributed to the budget in full at this stage, any delayed payments would be subject to the penal interest charges that I mentioned.

Several members of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee argued last week that, contrary to the argument which I have given, payment in full would tend to prejudice the case rather than failure to pay in full. The Government do not accept that view. In our view, the only sensible way to proceed in such cases is to be guided by the judgment of those who are expert in the areas concerned, and our advice has been that it is failure to pay in full that would tend to prejudice our cases, and in particular our request for an interim order.

There are three particular points. First, our advice is that the court is likely to be more impressed if the Council and member states adopt a common approach than if different member states pursue different courses. The dispute is effectively between the Community's institutions. The more an institution shows itself divided, the weaker its position will be. We have therefore been concerned to co-ordinate our approach with other member states and the Council. Although we shall wish, where appropriate, to bring additional arguments to the attention of the court, we do not want to fragment the Council's position or divert the court's attention from the main area of dispute. As I mentioned before, all other member states will be contributing in full.

Secondly, the court may be expected to have some regard to the reasonableness of the conduct of the parties before it. Our advice is that our case will not be helped, least of all our application for an interim order, if we act in a way which appears to pre-empt the very judgment that we are asking the court to make. It is worth bearing in mind that our application for an interim order in the present circumstances will, from the Community's point of view, be novel and controversial.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose*——

Mr. Brooke: I shall not give way. I have given way at least 10 times already.

Thirdly, our advice is that there is advantage in being plaintiff rather than defendant throughout the nexus of cases surrounding the disputed budget. Our posture will be strengthened by standing on the high ground rather than being on the defensive. If we did not pay in full, we should almost certainly find ourselves on the defensive. The Commission would almost certainly sue us for the amounts not paid and for penal interest charges on these amounts. It takes the view that member states have an obligation to pay in full towards an adopted budget unless and until the court has ordered otherwise. We would then be defendants in one of the nexus of court cases and our posture would consequently be impaired.

To sum up, the important thing in the Government's view is to win the court cases, or the European Parliament will gain substantial power at the expense of national Governments and Parliaments. I freely acknowledge how tempting it is not to pay in full in the meantime. However, in the Government's view it would be quite misguided to act in ways which, on the best available legal advice, would tend to prejudice the court cases.

I turn to the parliamentary and payments procedures. The Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service questioned me at some length on these issues last week, and I want to say at once how much I respect and share its wish to protect the rights of this House in matters of Supply.

Before coming to the substance, I want to stress that the procedures that we are now adopting — the Supplementary Estimate and the debate in the House today —are those suggested by the Committee's predecessor in the last Parliament in 1982. The Government have complied with its suggestion and that is why the House has the opportunity today to debate the issues fully before any payment is made towards the disputed part of the budget.

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Brooke: On substance, I should like, first, to say something about how payments will be made and financed. The due date for our first VAT payment towards the 1986 budget as adopted by the Parliament is today — January's payment is based by convention on the draft budget—and the Commission will seek to charge penal interest in the event of any delay. The Government therefore intend, if the House approves the Supplementary Estimate, to credit the Commission's account today with some £12 million in respect of January and February. This will be financed initially from the Contingencies Fund pending formal proceedings in due course on the March Consolidated Fund Bill.

As I have already mentioned, the Government are applying to the European Court for an interim order suspending implementation of the disputed part of the budget. If our application succeeds, we hope that it will not be necessary to go on contributing to the disputed elements of the budget. If we do not succeed, it may be necessary to make further ex gratia payments in early March and during 1986-87. Any such payments would similarly be financed initially by advances from the Contingencies Fund. From April onwards these advances would be made pending parliamentary approval of a 1986-87 Estimate and the Appropriation Act next summer.

Several members of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service suggested last week that payment should be delayed until the House has passed a

Consolidated Fund Bill. I have considered these suggestions most carefully, but have to say that I cannot accept them. Payment is urgent, and the best interests of the United Kingdom taxpayer require that we should credit the Commission's account tonight.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the Government have investigated fully the ability to pay to the Commission on an escrow basis? Such a payment would not prejudge the court's decision, and interest would accumulate for the United Kingdom if we were proved to be right in our application to the court. That is a common practice in commerce.

Mr. Brooke: The Government have investigated that course, but we could not proceed on that basis because of the effect of current European regulations.

It was not possible to plan on having sufficient time to complete all stages of a Consolidated Fund Bill in both Houses and obtain Royal Assent. These procedures, which are now formal, will be completed as part of the usual March Consolidated Fund Bill. The well understood and recognised role of the Contingencies Fund is to provide for payments that are urgent, in anticipation of Supply procedure. In accordance with the long-established practice, therefore, the Government are justified in assuming that if the House votes in favour of the Estimate tonight, it will not vote differently in the formal proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Finally, I shall say something about the Government's statutory authority for making payments towards the disputed element of the budget. This, too, is a subject which was raised by members of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. As the special Supplementary Estimate makes clear, this will be one of the many cases where expenditure relies on the House's approval of the Estimate and, in due course, of the confirming Appropriation Act. In the Government's view, such authority is sufficient and by no means uncommon. I should like to explain to the House rather fully why the Government are in no doubt that this is a perfectly proper way to proceed.

As long as the House of Commons provides any necessary funds, a Minister can carry out any appropriate function which has not been prohibited by statute. In the present case, there is no legal restriction which prevents the Treasury from making an ex gratia payment to the Community, and funds are available from the Contingencies Fund initially and then through completion of the Supply procedures.

There are, I accept, cases where specific statutory authority is appropriate, although not legally necessary. The relevant doctrine is based on exchanges between the Treasury and the Committee of Public Accounts in 1932. The Treasury and the PAC reached general agreement on the subject of when an Estimate and the Appropriation Act would not suffice, and I cannot do better therefore than to quote from the relevant Treasury minute on the PAC second report of that year. The Treasury then agreed that "practice should normally accord with the view expressed by the PAC that, where it is desired that continuing functions should be exercised by a Government Department (particularly where such functions involve financial liabilities extending beyond a given year) it is proper that the powers and duties to be exercised should be defined by specific statute."
In all other cases, by implication, the Treasury and the PAC agreed that specific statutory authority was unnecessary.

The Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service referred to "Erskine May", page 791. Our proposed method of proceeding does not fall into either category described by "Erskine May" as having been criticised by the PAC. First, this ex gratia payment is not illegal under any existing statute. Secondly, as I have already implied, we do not propose to create a continuing function of Government involving financial liabilities extending over several years. Perish the thought! The procedure that we are adopting for obtaining the consent of the House is, therefore, fully in accord with established practice and with the recommendations of the PAC.

There are two conclusions which emerge clearly from what I have been saying. First, the Government are pursuing the right policies with regard to the disputed Community budget for 1986. Secondly, we are seeking Parliament's approval in the right way. I therefore have no hesitation in commending the Supplementary Estimate to the House.

5.7 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): It is incumbent upon me, on behalf of the Opposition, to welcome the Minister of State to the first of his many EEC budget debates. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he has marked his debut at the Dispatch Box by not fully taking the House along with him as he advanced his arguments. Basically, the Government's argument, as I followed it, could be summarised by the example of a Mafia mobster saying, "Here is your demand for protection money. I suggest that you pay it. If you do, you will not have a case for going to the police." That seems in logic to be the way in which the Government's argument is being pursued.

The outside observer would regard the Government's posture this evening with incredulity, and wonder what it was all about. Is an ex gratia payment really being made by the Government to an illegal budget in Europe? Is it really a Tory Government, who have arraigned Liverpool and Lambeth councillors in the dock for their illegal budgets, who are happily paying over £6 million a month to the EEC in response to an illegal demand? Is this not unreasonable extortion by the extravagant Brussels machine on the understanding and long-suffering British taxpayer, or is it something entirely different?

On the surface, it seems that we are being presented with a mystery, and the issue was more mysterious when the Minister resumed his place than before he explained the Government's case. In reality, we are faced with a piece of organised hypocricy. We have been presented with a self-generated smokescreen and much of the smoke has been generated by Conservative Back Benchers. The purpose is to disguise the real purpose of the payments.

The Government have brought in yet another duo of Ministers to deal with complex subject. We have another duo to succeed the great Rifkind-Stewart duet, which sang to us in so many previous debates. It was interrupted only by the Halley's comet of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who burst on the stage and made a number of grandiose promises. Before any of us could even quote them, he had disappeared to the Government Back Benches.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Did the hon. Member write this himself?

Mr. Robertson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would like an interpreter for these debates but if he listens carefully he will hear an argument that will appeal even to him.

In September the Council produced the 1986 draft budget, which made no provision for the costs of the accession of Spain and Portugal, or for the so-called burden of the past. The burden of past commitments is not yet paid. The European Parliament then chose to add those commitments to the budget. Rather than say that the European Parliament was wrong, the Budget Council of Ministers added 900 million ecu to the budget. That included about 320 million ecu for the cost of enlargement which it had omitted from the original draft budget, no doubt through some misunderstanding. The European Parliament was still not satisfied that the budget would meet all the commitments, and the Council of Ministers then offered to add a further 242 million ecu, but the European Parliament turned it down.

The 242 million ecu is a significant sum. If it had been accepted by the European Parliament it would have reduced the illegality, with which we are so consumed this evening, from 629 million ecu to 387 million ecu. That 242 million ecus would have reduced the illegal supplementary margin to barely 1 per cent. of the total EC budget for 1986. The original climbdown by the Council of Ministers was a visible admission that the original draft budget of September 1985 was wrong and wholly irresponsible, as it was massively short and could not meet the Community's commitments for the following year. If the budget is illegal, the bulk of it is illegal because of the actions of the Budget Ministers, and the Minister was more culpable than most, as he attended the meetings. They knew that they were framing a budget which was inadequate for the demands on it, and they had to admit it to the tune of the 950 million ecu increase that they offered in December.

In the European Parliament the budget Minister's spokesman confessed in December that a further supplementary budget would be necessary later this year. Yet the Ministers, including our Minister, insisted on artificially cutting the amounts that everyone knew would be needed this year. In January the budget rapporteur, Mr. Christodoulou, offered a compromise to the Ministers. He said that if they would agree to a specific amount for the supplementary budget, a deal could be done because the supplementary budget would be necessary. He was spurned, and the Minister led those who rejected and demanded more cuts in the regional and social funds. He continues to insist on the fairy-tale fantasy of budget discipline and farm spending cuts. He is responsible for the budget.

This crisis of illegality is self-created, as is the looming and much greater financial shambles facing the Community. It is pure humbug and pedantry of the worst kind for the Government to attack and lambast the European Parliament, whatever its manifest failings, as a cover for the budget Ministers' short-sighted, weak-willed abdiction of control over the common agricultural policy's appetite for Community cash.

Why this great speed? By midnight tonight the House must agree the payment through one of the most unique forms of parliamentary subterfuge. In April 1985 Ministers passed the intergovernmental agreement to cover the shortfall in the 1984 budget. It was agreed in April, came before the House in June, and the Government delayed ratification until November and did not make the payment to Europe until a final demand was made by the budget Commissioner at the end of 1985.

Many hon. Members who questioned the Minister will be interested to know that in 1984, the last full year for which accounts are available, the Court of Auditors' report shows that the European Parliament also added expenditure to the European social and regional funds. Ninety four million ecu was added to the budget, but not a single ecu was spent by the Commission on items outwith the Council of Ministers' budget. Although we shall pay the European Commission, it will not spend the money on the items that are laid down by the European Parliament. Every hon. Member knows that the Commission will spend it by and large on the obligatory side of the equation which grows inexorably every day — on more and more Community farm spending. Taxpayers are the last people likely to get back anything from that. In 1984 the Commission ignored the additional provisions, and the money simply disappeared yet again into the vortex.

The crux of the matter, of which Conservative Members will undoubtedly make a meal, is: if the Government are so sure of their ground on illegality, why are they capitulating so easily and quickly? The supplementary memorandum to the Select Committee makes it absolutely clear. It states:

> "The Government's lawyers have advised that there is no legal obligation on the United Kingdom to pay the disputed amounts."

That could not be clearer. Why are the Government, who have arraigned councillors and threatened them with disqualification, surcharge and bankruptcy, laying down their arms and surrendering before the European Parliament, if their case is so strong?

Mr. Dykes: Has not the hon. Gentleman missed the Minister's point, which is that precisely because there is no legal obligation to make the payment, the act of making it in advance of the court's judgment increases the Government's moral and juridical position?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is a suave operator in most circumstances, but one would have to be truly gullible to accept that argument. If this is a juridical court considering the case, there is absolutely nothing to suggest that the fact that one has made illegal payments gives one higher ground over one who says that on principle there is no legal case for paying, goes to court and argues the case.

Mr. Budgen: One would certainly think that of a judge in the United Kingdom, but judges in the EEC may be affected by political considerations, such as whether the money has been paid. Indeed, that could be a reason why the lawyers who advised my hon. Friend the Minister did not wish their advice to be made known to the House. If the judges of the EEC are politically corrupted, it is an important issue, about which the House should know.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes at least one valid point. If European Court judgments are to be influenced by the willingness of parties to make payments which they believe to be illegal, we should be worried about it. The Minister's interpretation is interesting, and I am sure that it will be studied by constitutional lawyers, who have greater skill than I, with due care and attention. Whatever legal advice is being given to the Minister, some

of which he has faithfully relayed to us, it will undoubtedly be made available to the House and the wider world via Mr. Chris Moncrieff or some other oracle.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman explain to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) something which may have escaped his broad vision? If one makes the payment before the matter comes up in court, and if the other part is spent, there is no point in winning the case at all.

Mr. Robertson: Payments to the EEC are made on a monthly basis. If we are right, we can stop those payments at any time and make sure that the balance is kept at the end of the financial period.

How limp and lame the Minister's explanations are this evening. It is doubtful whether anybody in the House accepted the limp and lame excuses he has given. They seem even more limp and lame when set against the backdrop of the penal sanctions levelled against rate-capped councils in this country. Of course, it does not just smell of that. It smells of a cover for something else which has nothing to do with the claimed illegality of that 1 per cent. of the budget which the Parliament has added to its estimate. The truth is that it is yet another payment to fuel the mighty and uncontrollable engine of the CAP, which is yet again driving the Community into another horrendous financial crisis. This is not a payment on account and it will not be returned to this country even if the court action over the 1 per cent. is a triumph for those self-same legal masterminds.

In his evidence to the Select Committee the Minister said:

"the disputed elements in the budgets are likely either to be repaid to the United Kingdom or to be broadly offset by extra receipts from the budget: the disputed elements related mainly to the Regional Development and the Social Funds."

On Monday December 2 in the *Financial Times* the regional commissioners of the EEC made it clear that

"Britain is in danger of suffering most from the freeze on EEC spending on the social and regional fund next year".

Even if the Minister's prognostications come true we shall not find ourselves in balance, because when the funds for the regional and social fund dry up in the middle of this year, as everybody confidently expects, Britain is likely to lose most. It is simply providing more cash for the EEC to rescue the budget Ministers from the dishonest and shoddy way in which they put together a budget for 1986 which did not add up, will not add up, and cannot add up, and which will inexorably demand more and more cash as the truth catches up with it.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Robertson: The truth makes the Supplementary Estimate look like a petty cash box. We have a right to expect frankness, perhaps a rare frankness, from the new Minister about the scale of the real crisis and the kind of demands likely to be made on the British taxpayer this year.

Budget commissioner Hanning Christopherson was right in January when he warned that regional and social fund projects would grind to a halt this year on the basis of present funding. As I said, we have been warned by the regional commissioner that the United Kingdom will suffer most heavily if spending is curtailed. That news is bad enough but as usual there is worse to come. The 1986 budget, even the illegal one over which we are getting heated this evening, has some vital pieces missing from it. There is no provision in that budget for the 1986 fixing of agricultural prices. We know what that usually leads to. Secondly, and most significantly, there is no provision for a change in the dollar-ecu rate, which has already this year added 400 million ecu to the CAP expenditure. Thirdly, there is no provision for the massive drop in world grain prices, which is likely to bloat European Community costs and keep the price of food ludicrously high for British citizens.

Mr. Junker, who spoke on behalf of the budget Ministers in the Parliament, was spot on when he warned of an indeterminate supplementary budget to be presented to European taxpayers later in 1986 like some sickening surcharge on a long paid-up continental holiday.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): There is no pleasure in it.

Mr. Robertson: Not all holidays are pleasurable, as my hon. Friend knows.

The debate is about the truth of the European Community budget discipline which we have been promised again this evening, as though telling us about budget discipline was a substitute for budget discipline itself. We warned at the time that budget discipline was a sham and it is now seen to be as bogus as we predicted.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman bear with me? Many hon. Members wish to speak and I do not want to use too much of the short amount of time that the Government have allowed for the debate.

The debate is about a European Community, the whole effort of which is now being subverted by a farm policy that has gone berserk and which now consumes 74 per cent. of the entire budget and which again threatens to burst its banks. Agriculture should be at the front of our minds this evening because it is the common agricultural policy that is at the heart of the shambles and that will bring this hapless Treasury Minister, as it did with so many of his predecessors, back to the Dispatch Box again and again this year.

The newly promoted Secretary of State for Scotland, the predecessor of the new Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, stood at the Dispatch Box on 14 November and used the memorable words "an inbuilt control" when referring to agricultural spending. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has an affectation for not using notes when making his speeches. If one is being generous to him one could say that it was a lack of notes that made him so rash and brave as to utter those words. I think that those words should give comfort to many hon. Members on the Government Back Benches because if someone can say something like that without shame and get in to the Cabinet there is hope for many others to come.

We now know what he meant by those words. He was talking about a secret report. We know that it is a secret report because we read about it in the *Financial Times*. That report has been drawn up by Mr. Frans Andriessen and Mr. Henning Christophersen, the farm and budget commissioners. It tells us that the unsold food in store in the European Community is now worth 10·5 billion ecu. That is 10 times the stocks of only four years ago. Cereal stocks alone are up from 6 million tonnes to 17 million

[Mr. Robertson]

tonnes in the last year. The cost of storage and destocking is up by 1 billion ecu this year, to 4·4 billion ecu. That is nearly one quarter of the entire agricultural budget.

From the Press Association tapes this evening we learn that the journal *Agra Europe* tells us that Commissioner Andriessen has today called for an extra £2,000 million over the next three years to set up a special stock dumping fund for special additional subsidies to dump food surpluses on the international market—additional money for an additional special fund yet again. That is all happening as farm incomes drop this year across the Community by 8 per cent. and fall in this country by 17·5 per cent. If that is what is known as "inbuilt control" we know precisely how to trust the Government's estimates. All the time the discipline disintegrates as American grain prices fall on the international market.

In November we reminded the then Common Market team here that the existing budget was only 150 million ecu from the 1·4 per cent. VAT own resources ceiling. We demand and need to know where that is now. There is the extra 400 million ecu for the drop in the dollar-ecu rate. There is the extra £2,000 million over three years for the special fund. The regional and social funds are drying up. The agriculture prices are still unfixed. When all those things are happening, how far are we from the ceiling on own resources? How much will be needed in intergovernmental agreements and cash handouts to the Community this year to keep the bloated food surpluses growing? The House has a right to know, especially in the context of the debate. It is time that Ministers told us what they know to be the truth about what is yet to be demanded.

The Government come here today telling the House that this is a one-off payment, a temporary payment, until they can get the illegally demanded cash back. They seem willing to face the rage of their Back Benchers, or maybe it is all a big misunderstanding again. Conservative Back Benchers are raging against those payments, made under extortion. The Government want that rage turned away from the incompetence of Ministers, including British Treasury Ministers; away from the sheer irresponsibility of the looming financial fiasco, and what it will mean for this country's taxpayers. The Government want that rage to be turned away from the fact that this is the start of another drip feed, not to food aid or regional or social fund schemes, to which some of us would subscribe, on a regular basis, but to an uncontrollable common agricultural policy. They are willing to face all that rage and embarrassment to protect the pure fiction that this is an ex gratia payment, and a reimbursible one at that. They may fool some of the people in the Chamber, although it seems to be precious few, and they will probably fool a few Conservative hon. Members who vote, but they do not fool the Opposition.

As the House of Lords report told us in December, the European Community's agriculture budget is out of control because of a "lack of political courage" to do something about it. When the Government and their Ministers representing us in the European Councils have the courage to control farm spending before it bankrupts us all perhaps we shall assist them in putting through measures such as tonight's, but in the meantime, as they watch farm spending spin away again into the red, and while all the time they champion and protect the charade that budget discipline is working, we shall, with honour and conviction, vote against the motion.

5.32 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): This is the sort of debate for which those concerned with parliamentary control of public expenditure require either a strong stomach or a very strong sense of humour. It raises several serious issues that we shall have little time to debate as we should.

I do not believe that one's attitude to the Estimate turns on whether one is in favour of or against British membership of the EEC. The plain fact is that it gives rise to more cause for concern for those who, like myself, are in favour of membership of the EEC than for those who take the opposite view. It is a dangerous development that has been described by my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

I am sorry that the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service was unable to produce a report on the matter because of the short time that we had to go into it. I hope that the evidence that we took, which is available in the Vote Office, will be of interest and help in clarifying a complex situation.

The Minister of State rightly said that the first part of the Estimate is concerned with repaying to the Contingencies Fund some £118 million, expended at the end of the past year, which meets the tranche of the additional own resources that were paid in advance. I do not wish to comment on that now. I hope that the Select Committee will look further into it. We do not get interest on the advance payment that we have made, and we are now being told that we shall pay penal interest on the ex gratia payment, referred to in the second part of the Estimate.

We are faced with a budget that is clearly illegal, and raises some difficult questions. It is true that, even if we succeed in the court case and the budget is declared illegal, the budget as it then stands will still be one that the Government oppose as not being consistent with effective budgetary discipline. Yet that is the basis on which the House was persuaded to increase the own resources from 1 per cent. to 1·4 per cent. That is very important. At that time, several of us said that in our view the intergovenmental agreement was not consistent with the treaty, and it was wrong that the situation should arise in which budget expenditure exceeded available revenue. That view has been upheld by the EEC's own Court of Auditors. Therefore, I hope that there will be a further statement on that aspect.

The Estimate itself raises several important questions about parliamentary procedure, to which the Minister of State referred at the end of his speech. As my hon. Friend said, it is true that in 1982 the Select Committee objected to a system whereby money was paid to the EEC out of the Contingencies Fund and reimbursed by a spring Supplementary Estimate. The procedure now adopted is also objectionable. We have before us an Estimate, but we do not have before us a Consolidated Fund Bill. Under the new procedures nowadays, that is entirely formal. There is no reason why we should not have had a proper Consolidated Fund Bill, even in the short time that is now available to us. That would have been the right procedure for the Government to adopt.

The more important point that gives the Select Committee cause for concern, to which the Minister sought to reply, is the fact that there is no underlying legislation, no primary legislation, which would justify the payment. The House is being asked to make an ex gratia payment that is not covered by existing legislation. As the Minister of State said, it is possible for a Government to put forward an Estimate, a Consolidated Fund Bill and so on, which provides the basis for the expenditure being made. But I question strongly whether what my hon. Friend said in his closing remarks was correct, because the Public Accounts Committee, on former occasions, has drawn attention to the way in which the procedures can be abused. In particular, I refer my hon. Friend to page 791 of "Erskine May," which says:

"Expenditure by a department for purposes not covered by its existing legal powers normally requires to be specifically authorised by a financial resolution associated with a bill".

That is not being done in this case. The Minister sought to make a distinction and to say that the circumstances that we now face were appropriate, but "Erskine May" states later on:

"There have been cases, too, in which the Appropriation Act has been used, not merely as a substitute for specific legislation, but to override the limits imposed by existing legislation."

The Minister of State did not answer that point. I believe that it is clear that we are overriding

"the limits imposed by existing legislation."

That is embodied in the European Communities Act 1972, which in turn is reflected in the treaty. The Government themselves say that what is happening is illegal. Therefore, it seems to me that they are going beyond the existing legislation. That is an abuse of procedure of the sort to which the Public Accounts Committee has objected. I hope very much that the Public Accounts Committee will look into that matter and let us have a considered view. Perhaps such abuses could be prevented in future by the Standing Order being amended, for example.

It is also objectionable to use the Contingencies Fund if one has time to go through the proper procedures. There is no reason why we should go on this merry-go-round. We could have had the Estimate, a Consolidated Fund Bill and a Bill justifying the payment in the time that is available, short though that has been.

Mr. Deakins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Higgins: I should like to continue because hon. Members wish to speak, and this is a difficult matter to explain.

I now come to the substance of the argument. I welcome the fact — it is common ground — that the Government believe that the way in which the European Parliament has behaved is illegal. In my view, they are right to fight the case, as the Council of Ministers is right to fight the case. It would be an enormous extension of the powers of the European Parliament if it were allowed to get away with what it is seeking to do.

The Government are right to take the action that they have proposed. Nevertheless, I am very doubtful about the ex gratia payment device. The Select Committee was told that it was essential that this procedure should be ratified by midnight tonight, otherwise there is a danger that we shall be charged interest on the ex gratia payment. This is pure Alice in Wonderland. We ought not to be confronted by such a ridiculous situation.

I believe I am right in saying that all Conservative Members have grave doubts — nobody, apart from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, has expressed a contrary view — that our chance of winning the case will be enhanced if an ex gratia payment is made. If the Government have confidence in the strength of their case, that is a very odd approach.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) asked whether we would get back the ex gratia payment if we won the case. I was heartened when my hon. Friend the Minister said that it could be deducted from a future payment, but I should like to know the basis for his statement. I was not aware that we could adopt such a procedure.

Mr. Brooke: I understood my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) to be asking his question in the event of the interim action being decided in our favour. I said that any sum that we had previously paid might be deducted from future payments, but that it would depend upon the judgment of the European Court in response to our interim application.

Mr. Higgins: I am not sure that I understand that answer. We should like to know the basis for my hon. Friend the Minister's statement. It appears to contain a large number of uncertainties. If we are to make this ex gratia payment we need to know whether, if we win the case; we shall get it back; otherwise it will be a straight payment to the European Community.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The fact that interest rates are higher in this country than in most of the other European Community countries suggests, surely, that the penalty factor should weigh less with us than with others, and it is all the more reason for us to be given credit for the interest charged if the payment is found to have been unnecessary.

Mr. Higgins: I agree with my hon. Friend. Most unfortunately, however, the Select Committee understood that we should be charged a penal rate, the highest rate in the European Community, which is over 20 per cent. I am therefore unable to reassure my hon. Friend on that point.

The argument is simple. It turns upon the legal advice and the expert advice that was given. After two and a half hours of questioning, in which my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury, was as forthcoming as he could possibly be, he failed completely to produce any substantial legal argument which suggested that we stand a better chance in the European Court if we pay in advance than if we do not pay in advance. It was pointed out earlier that it would be very surprising if the European Court were to be influenced by that kind of payment.

The whole matter gives one very grave cause for concern. There is no evidence that budgetary discipline is effective. The non-obligatory payments are in excess and the obligatory payments for agriculture are far in excess of anything that had been justified in argument to the House. Unless, therefore, my hon. Friend the Minister of State can do very much better in his winding up speech than he did in his opening speech, I fear that I shall be unable to support the motion.

5.45 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The righ. hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) has made his usual careful and, in debates of this kind, highly

[Sir Russell Johnston]

critical speech. I do not propose to follow him into the legal and constitutional area. I am well aware that I do not share his competence. It is sufficient to say that, particularly for the layman, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the legality of the European Parliament's action. I presume that we should not be going to the European Court unless there was an argument about its legality. I presume that we should not otherwise be going to the European Court to establish whether its action was legal or illegal.

There is also uncertainty about whether the Government have exceeded their proper powers. I fail to follow why an ex gratia payment should affect a judgment of the European Court. It was suggested in an intervention by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) that the judges of the European Court are politically corrupt. That may have been a rumbustious way of putting it rather than a serious suggestion. At least, I hope so. In our view, the Community budget——

Mr. Marlow: There is only one of you.

Sir Russell Johnston: There are two of us. The hon. Gentleman's mental powers have been failing for many years. His eyesight seems to be following.

The Community budget is inadequate to meet effectively the redistributive and regenerative roles of the European Community, which have been unable to develop properly. I refer in particular to the regional and social funds. I recall, because I was there, that when the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) was the President of the European Commission he referred not to a 2·5 per cent. but to a 1·4 per cent. of VAT budget. The Liberal and Social Democratic parties believe that a way should be found to give the directly elected European Parliament more budgetary authority. That was stated clearly in our manifesto.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Russell Johnston: I shall give way in a moment.

We dissent from the approach which the Government and the Opposition have adopted to the budget. We wish that a more generous approach had been adopted, even before the Council's "Second Reading" debate. If that had happened, we should not be in this mess.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We respect the hon. Gentleman's pro-European views, but we are not debating whether the European Community's budget is good or desirable, but whether it is illegal. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he wishes this House to condone and to be an accessory to an illegal act?

Sir Russell Johnston: I am saying no such thing, nor am I quite so sure as the hon. Gentleman is what it is we are debating. I suspect that in all of these debates we are debating practically the same thing, and I do not believe that quite that distinction can be made. We believe that the European Community should have a greater role to play in non-obligatory expenditure. That is in question tonight because of the actions of the European Parliament.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Russell Johnston: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman—there must be a record kept somewhere of such things—for perhaps the 54th time, I would remark, as the Minister did en passant during his speech, that the agreement on budgetary discipline, which with some justice has attracted a bit of scorn, has, nevertheless, not yet been breached on non-obligatory expenditure, where, after all, the problem of excessive expenditure arises.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy. He says that he would like the European Parliament to have greater budgetary powers. Does that mean that it is the Liberal party's policy that the European Parliament should be entitled to levy taxation upon the British people? What else could it mean?

Sir Russell Johnston: In the long term a way must be found to do that.

Mr. Marlow: A sharing of burdens.

Sir Russell Johnston: Certainly a sharing of burden. One of the great criticisms of the European Parliament at the moment is that it has the power only to spend taxation without any responsibility for the raising of it. There is no direct accountability, and that is a fair criticism. So, yes, essentially I would agree with the hon. Gentleman, but before I leave that point I must add that we must remember that while it is true that the European Parliament has added to the budget, when it comes to the actual expenditure of that money it is not the Parliament that spends it, but the Commission, and the Council regulates that expenditure and determines what are the proper projects.

Essentially, I am saying that the situation in which we now find ourselves need not have arisen if the Government had adopted a positive approach in Milan and Luxembourg when there were the makings of an acceptable accord in the Council which Parliament would have considered to represent a reasonable response. We have brought this on ourselves. It is tragic that we should now have got ourselves into what is clearly a thorough-going legal mess, which, in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) the Minister said could well go on for 18 months or so before a determination is made, and it is likely that the institutional conflict will worsen during that time.

The way in which the European Parliament has behaved has been heavily criticised by those unfavourably disposed to the EEC in the press and elsewhere, and doubtless there will be criticism during the debate, but, as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said in an incisive speech, this is "a self-created crisis" and those responsible are the Ministers whose original draft budget was grossly inadequate and who failed abjectly in a situation in which a rational negotiated settlement could have been achieved. To that failure British Ministers made their full contribution.

The Parliament has added 1 per cent. of its budget. That is the scale of this issue, as the hon. Gentleman reminded us. I must support the hon. Gentleman on the fact that the regional and social funds may run out. That is a real danger. He is right. That is the sort of thing to which the Government should be addressing themselves anxiously. I also agree that the problem of the CAP is at the heart of this. Although, as I have said many times, it is an illusion to believe that somehow or other that can be dealt with at a stroke, what disturbs me is the absence of a clear forward plan.

That is the serious issue, not the desire of the Parliament to try to ensure that the Community's limited

social contribution is sustained. Those circumstances do not require one to oppose the Government in the Lobby, even though one is highly critical of the way in which they have conducted affairs.

5.53 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said that he would be brief and then spoke for 26 minutes.

Mr. George Robertson: I never said that I would be brief.

Mr. Dykes: Perhaps I misheard. I thought that that was the implication of his anxiety to get on and not take interventions.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said that he would not take long.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Member for Hamilton then spoke mostly about agricultural policy, but I agree with the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) that he put his finger on the reality of what had happened in what amounted to the Council of Ministers' obstinacy and obduracy in failing to grasp the realities of the situation with the enlargement of the Community. What other course did the European Parliament have, faced with that obduracy and refusal to draft a proper budget, even to use the appropriate conciliation mechanism, than to do something that can be regarded in some circles as an illegal act? We may have to reserve our judgment on that until the European Court reaches its decision. It may dig up all sorts of precedents and evidential items which show that the European Parliament had no other realistic course of action. It would be wrong to predjudge that, so we are dealing with only a technical motion tonight.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Is not the argument about what else they could do exactly the same argument used by the Socialist councillors of Camden and Liverpool who took the view that the limitations imposed by the Government did not allow them to spend as much money as they felt was right? Therefore, is not my hon. Friend supporting the Socialist councillors of Camden and Liverpool in breaking the law?

Mr. Dykes: Despite the obvious temptations, my hon. Friend is not right in trying to draw that comparison between the domestic political crisis between local authorities and the Government, and the European situation. The conciliation and consultation procedure in the budget formation of the EC is a different exercise where the parties get together round a negotiating table and negotiate agreed figures, not on obligatory expenditure but on non-obligatory items.

Once again, it shows that the whole budget procedure is out of kilter because the European Parliament should now have a greater role and should be able to deal with much more than a tiny marginal tranche of total spending in non-obligatory categories unless the Council of Ministers is to be more like-minded with the European Parliament in future on taking budget outlays ahead as the Community expands, both on enlargement and the need to spend more on the regional and social funds.

Of course, hon. Members and others are right to put their finger on the glaring problem that is building up over agricultural spending. But in dealing with the motion tonight it is absurd for my hon. Friends—there is a glaring absence of Labour Members, who, apart from one distinguished presence on the Opposition Back Benches, do not seem to be interested, and Members of other parties,—to express, I hope not in a semi-hysterical fashion, tremendous indignation about what is a technical motion on a Supplementary Estimate. I think that it is literally correct to say that it should excite no one beyond saying that we are all in the business of trying to control, rationally and reasonably, Government spending.

We all listen with great care to everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) says on this subject. He knows a profound amount about it. But even he faces the danger of always being much more excited and indignant about tiny amounts of money in the EC than about domestic items. We are talking about £6 million a month of extra interest payments to be incurred and £18 million over three months in comparison with huge quantities of domestic Government spending which, if one looks back at the record of what was said in Committee and in the House, he and other hon. Members do not get so worked up about.

I do not often hear my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) referring to the fact that we now spend £20 billion on unemployment benefits because of our huge level of unemployment. Surely that is a much more serious problem than the minuscule amounts of money in the EC. Even the total budget of £22 billion. is tiny in comparison with the total United Kingdom Government's spending of £150 billion. Our portion, moreover, as a result of the budget rebate—that has not been referred to so far tonight, although we are only halfway through the debate, and I hope that my hon. Friends will refer to it—swamps any tiny amount that we have to pay here, we hope temporarily, as a result of the future court judgment, on the basis, I presume, of expert legal advice.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to that and I am content that on the basis of sound legal advice from Government lawyers, they have decided that that is correct. The revelation of legal advice to Government is always a difficult area. I said that on the basis of what my hon. Friend said. I am content to rest on his recommendation that, on the basis of legal advice received by the Government, it seems right to make that payment. It would look awful and crazy if we were to take a position separate from the other member states who, with their equally clever and highly paid Government lawyers, have decided to pay the money in advance. It would look ridiculous if there were a difference of position. The court would notice that immediately.

It is important for the position of the Council, even of one disagrees with the larger background which, as a good and enthusiastic European I do, that it and the Government should maintain the same position. Perhaps the Governmment feel that they are likely to win the case anyway, and then the money can be refunded.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *rose*——

Mr. Dykes: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall not give way, because by looking at the clock, I know that it would be unfair on other hon. Members.

Let me assume that the money could be refunded. To some extent, this is new territory, and I can only say with

[Mr. Dykes]

my subjective confidence that we shall get most of the money back. This is the only, absolutely essential, way for the Government to establish their moral position in the face of such a course of action. They must be whiter than white as they approach the European Court, and be able to say that they have done certain things that their legal advisers have suggested that they do.

This may be a historical judgment about the relationships between the institutions of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Tonight's motion is only a small, limited part of the wider scene and it would be wholly irresponsible for hon. Members, particularly those on my side of the House, not to support the Government on the motion, which remains entirely technical. It is not a matter to cause great anxiety and it is much more important to see the wider picture both for the development of the Community budget — the 1986-87 budget will be even more important because of its expenditure on agriculture—and the way in which the Government will respond when the court has had time to deliberate.

6.2 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I remind the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) that big issues can arise from the expenditure of small amounts of money. I refer him to the 1630s and the case of ship money, which eventually involved the country in a civil war. The principle is what is important, rather than the amounts at stake.

The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) made an interesting speech. Tonight we are dealing with a House of Commons matter, to which there are two aspects. The right hon. Member spoke about one aspect, that of Supply procedures and so on. The PAC, of which I have the honour to be a member, may need to take a look at procedures again. Apparently it has not done so since 1932.

The PAC should say, in the light of the interim judgment given by the court, whether we should seek to make some other recommendations, if the court were to refuse the interim judgment for which the Government have asked and we were therefore obliged to make these ex gratia payments until the court had reached a substantive judgment later in the year. In those circumstances, we would have to make sure that the Government provided time in the next financial year for us to consider these things properly as this Supplementary Estimate takes us only to the end of the financial year.

Some substantive issues have been raised. This is a House of Commons matter, and I am concerned about the aspects of the relationship between the Assembly and the Council of Ministers. In a sense, the Council of Ministers is a euphemism for national Governments and Parliaments, because that is what it represents. The issues that we have raised are at least as important as those raised when we discussed the intergovernmental agreement which was outwith the treaties and possibly the most important aspect of our relationship with the EEC institutions since we joined in 1972-73.

I have been pointing out for several years that the Assembly is constantly seeking to increase its powers. I see at least four federalists here today, on both sides of the House, and they will naturally welcome that move. In its attempts to increase its powers, the Assembly is constantly aided and abetted by the Commission and, where appropriate, by the European Court. I am not as sanguine as the Government that we shall necessarily win the dispute when the Court makes its substantive judgment.

The Assembly has passed an illegal budget and the Commission is backing that against the Council. This is part of the process of creeping federalism, whereby Community institutions are always working to increase their power, not always but often, at the expense of national Parliaments, and there is a ratchet effect because power once conceded to the EEC is never regained. Therefore, the Assembly, the Commission, the Council and the Court are constantly receiving accretions of power, gained in various ways and through various procedures within the Community. That strengthens their power as against national Governments and Parliaments.

Control of finance is the key to power, as we know from the history of this country, and the Assembly recognises that. In its budget resolution, the first of two last year, on 14 November 1985 it said, in paragraph 9:

"the Commission should submit to the budgetary authority a proposal for a minimum-term course of action taking account of the need for the gradual transfer of certain funding operations from the national to the Community framework".

Funding operations are a means of raising money — forms of taxation. That shows the way that the mind of the Assembly is always working. We should always have that in the back of our minds.

The battle between the Assembly and the Council over funding is a battle between the Assembly and national Parliaments. The House could teach many in Europe a great deal about these things. We also have an important right. Federalists will support the Assembly, and we have already heard one or two expressions of support. However, non-federalists, and even those in favour of the Community, such as the right hon. Member for Worthing, will have to take careful note of what the Assembly is trying to do. Even the Government, in the Treasury minute to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, made clear their view that this would be a major change in the balance of power between Community institutions, and therefore between Community institutions and this national sovereign Parliament.

As is well known, the history of our Parliament started with disputes between Parliament and the Crown over the power to tax people. It was only later that Parliament sought to gain control of expenditure. In the case of the Assembly, the process has begun in reverse, partly because of the powers given to it in the Community treaties. It is starting with the power to spend money. In paragraph 16 of the budget resolution it says that the Assembly

"Takes the view that the Community cannot ignore or curtail, via the budget for 1986, the financial commitments it has entered into: is therefore resolved to ensure compliance with this principle throughout the budgetary procedure".

In other words, it is saying that spending must take priority over raising money to finance the expenditure. Eventually that will lead to the Assembly demanding the power to tax as well. We have already heard something about this from the federalists tonight.

The annual report of the Assembly is entitled "Progress towards Integration" and it shows, in the report of the budgetary committee, that it is working towards this. At long last, the Government have finally woken up to this creeping federalism. It was remarkable that the Prime

Minister, in her statement to the House on the Luxembourg summit, consistently throughout both statement and answers—I bet that there were many anguished faces in the Foreign Office — used the words " European Assembly" to describe what she had previously called the European Parliament.

The Assembly has been encouraged in this spendthrift approach by the big increase in own resources that this House and other Parliaments have granted. Its debates show that the Assembly is looking forward to the 1·6 per cent. VAT rate being introduced at a much earlier date than the Council and the Government would wish.

But that is not the only thing that has encouraged the Assembly in its spending spree. It has now proved possible, through the intergovernmental agreement, to raise money outside the framework of the treaties. Those two facts combined have convinced the Assembly that it can do what it likes on spending—we shall see more of this in the future—because national Governments will pay in any case, whether the spending is legal or illegal and whether or not it exceeds the budget. That is a cavalier attitude to expenditure and a threat to budget discipline.

The House must accept that the Assembly does not consider itself bound by budget discipline. Paragraph 12 of the budget resolution of 14 November states that the Assembly

"expresses its support for measures to contain expenditure as part of a coherent reform of the common agricultural policy, but demands that the nature of such containment be jointly defined by the budgetary authority and the Commission"—

that is, the Assembly and the Commission—

"and repudiates any unilateral decision by the Council in the matter."

That means that the Assembly will not go along with budgetary discipline until its powers are substantially increased by agreement with the Council and, no doubt, with national Governments.

The Assembly is now an enemy of national Parliaments in the EEC. It is competing for a share of the real power currently exercised by national Parliaments. It is encouraged by more powers than were given to it at the Luxembourg summit. It has an insatiable appetite for power and it must be stopped. The question is whether the action that the Government are taking will stop it.

I hope that the Minister can reply later to two semi-legal points. First, the Council is taking action under article 173 of the Treaty of Rome which states:

"The Court of Justice shall review the legality of acts of the Council and the Commission other than recommendations or opinions."

Nothing in that article states that the court shall review the actions of the European Assembly. Therefore, it makes it all the more astonishing that, with all their substantial legal advice, the national Governments represented at the last Council meeting did not seek to couple the Commission with the Assembly in the substantive court case. If they had coupled the two, they might have lost on the Assembly —because it is not mentioned in the article—but they would almost certainly have won on the Commission. I do not understand why the Government weakened their case on the substantive issue by not using the words in article 173 and taking parallel action against the Commission.

If the Minister cannot reply to my second point tonight, I hope that he will none the less consider it carefully, because it is in the interests not only of the House but of the Government. Later this year, we are threatened with a supplementary budget—everyone agrees that that is likely—and my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) made clear what the components of that budget would be and what its causes would be. If there is a supplementary budget, in addition to the budget that the European Assembly increased, will that not weaken our case before the court? We shall be asking national Parliaments for money additional to the budget that was originally approved by the Council and rejected by the Parliament. If I were not parti pris in the matter, it would suggest to me that the European Assembly was right in its attitude to Community expenditure in 1986. If and when the Government are faced with a supplementary budget, I ask them to think carefully about whether it might prejudice their position and that of the Council on the main issue.

If the United Kingdom loses, the Council and national Parliaments will have serious problems. More power will be granted to the European Assembly and it will mean an end to any semblance of budget discipline. An adverse verdict would lead to a crisis in the relationship between Britain and the rest of the EEC. I look forward to that very much.

6.14 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Anyone listening to my hon. Friend the Minister of State opening the debate would have concluded that it was a debate of great technicality and that only those who have studied the European institutions and obtained a PhD in law could usefully consider the matter further, but that is not so. The debate is mostly about a relatively simple value judgment as to how people get their will in political institutions.

We start with the assertion set out in the Government's briefing to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that the legal advice is that failure to pay in full would impair the United Kingdom's posture before the European Court. Yet my hon. Friend has never explained that to the House or to the Select Committee. He has never —as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary would say—addressed himself to the question of how the judges could disadvantage the United Kingdom in the proceedings. It must be emphasised that there are multiple proceedings. Of course, the proceedings brought by the Council could be dropped, but separate proceedings have been brought by France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

We know that France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands have already paid on the nail, so let us consider the likelihood that at least one of those nations will continue with its proceedings. How will it be possible, on this issue of principle, to disadvantage the United Kingdom as against another nation state? My hon. Friend has not explained, and I do not believe that it is explicable.

My hon Friend has not explained whether he is serious in his implied criticism that the EEC judges are affected by political considerations, but that is perhaps a narrow point.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend share my sense of mystery about how the court will be swayed in its consideration of the matter by whether Britain pays on this occasion, yet the Commission and the European Parliament are prepared to overspend illegally in advance of the judgment? They do not believe that that action will prejudice their case in front of the court, yet we are being asked to accept that if we do not pay it will affect us.

Mr. Budgen: I share the mystery. Like all great mysteries, it is incapable of explanation. Had it been capable of explanation, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State would have explained it long ago.

We are talking about political will. Anyone who observes the forces in the EEC institutions and here must have sympathy for a Treasury Minister who is trying to contain expenditure in the EC. The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) set out helpfully and with great knowledge the way in which the European Parliament, as it calls itself, wishes to extend its power to the disadvantage of the Council of Ministers, often with the connivance of the Commission. There are assertions that a proper system of budgetary control has been instituted, but we must compare those assertions with our knowledge that the American farmer will be substantially better supported by a new farm Bill. We know that the Americans are trying to reduce the value of their currency against that of other countries, and we know the effect that that will have on the cost of disposing of farm surpluses created by the EEC. Those who see those forces must sympathise with the Treasury in trying to push back this vast tide that is enveloping it.

We must also consider the political forces. The Labour party says that it favours strict control of expenditure in the EEC, but it also talks about the EEC being an organisation that can reduce unemployment in Britain. Labour Members speak in grandiloquent, even mawkish terms, about the regional and social funds. Even if the present Government are, at best, only lukewarm on industrial intervention, we are led to believe that a Labour Government would favour more EEC expenditure to create jobs.

The Liberal party is much more open about that. It is in favour of a very much higher level of expenditure, particularly on the infrastructure of the EEC. To that end, Liberal spokesmen say that they would be in favour of a much higher contribution from VAT to the EEC. They are quite open about that.

The constitutional, economic and political forces are all against the restriction of expenditure in the EEC. What is required most of all from the United Kingdom at the present time is a gesture of political will. We have the opportunity now to demonstrate that gesture, and that would not cost very much. Let us assume that my hon. Friend the Minister is correct in saying that, in this instance, that would lead to the imposition of penal interest charges. We are talking about only £18 million, so the penal interest would not be very high, but the gesture would demonstrate to everyone in this country — farmers, those who want extra payments from the regional fund and the multiplicity of interest groups that are ganged up behind increased expenditure in the EEC—that the Government are serious on this issue.

In the face of that, the Government have said that they have received expert legal advice. They do not want to tell us what that legal advice is and they will not be too specific about it. They do not mind junior Ministers coming before a Select Committee and having a disagreeable time for a couple of hours, but they will not condescend to particularities about that. All that the Government want us to know is that they have jolly good legal advice and, what is more, they probably paid pretty well for it.

Be that as it may, most legal advice of that sort is a value judgment. It is a judgment about how institutions and people respond to a token gesture. We now have an opportunity for a token gesture. The mood in this country towards the EEC is changing. In 1974 I campaigned for us to enter and remain in the EEC, but I, as well as anybody, now feel a change in mood.

In the Fontainebleau agreement, the Government, by giving a moral commitment to a further increase in the VAT contribution, while at the same time asserting that they had control over expenditure in the EEC, placed themselves in a difficult situation. If the Government come to the House time after time asking for more and yet more money, at some stage the nation will want to know why the Government did not refuse to pay what they regarded as an illegal demand. It would have been an illegal demand in respect of £18 million only, but the nation will want to know why the Government did not have the guts on this one occasion to say, enough is enough.

We are not really talking about legal advice. Rather, it is a matter of the Government's desire on all occasions to be seen as Communautaire, to go along with the consensus in Europe. The consensus in Europe, like the consensus within the interest groups in the member states, is towards increased expenditure. That uncontrolled expenditure is deeply damaging to those who hope that this country will continue to remain in the EEC.

6.24 pm

Mr. Robert Harvey (Clwyd, South-West): Today's debate goes to the heart of the European issue. Many would argue against giving greater powers to the European Parliament as it encroaches upon the sovereignty of our country. That argument comes from the so-called internationalists on the Labour Benches and from those Conservative Members who argue that Britain's sovereignty is being eroded by the EEC.

It ill suits those who criticise the EEC for being remote and bureaucratic to be against the proposed expenditure, except on the narrow legal grounds touched upon in the debate. The elected EEC Parliament has amended a budget proposal from the Commission that would absurdly have made Portugal and Spain net contributors to the Community — Portugal being one of the poorest countries in the EEC. If that had not been corrected, if the Parliament had failed to exercise the proper scrutiny over the EEC budget, there would be no control over the Commission's proposals—and in Strasbourg I witnessed the deliberations as the Parliament went line by line, page by page, through a great volume of EEC budget proposals — other than the control exercised in these debates by hon. Members. With the best will in the world, that cannot be classified as detailed or even detailed scrutiny.

Mr. Spearing: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but does he agree that one of the anomalies is that the Assembly, while having some powers—now under argument — of increasing expenditure, has as yet no powers of taxation? If it were to have both, there would be a unitary state. If the Assembly is to have some power, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it should, as the House did during the 1780s, combine these powers? There is no way out of the conundrum that the hon. Gentleman is proposing.

Mr. Harvey: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but there are some hon. Members, and I am one, who believe in the principle of no taxation without representation. If

the European Parliament can continue to extend its financial control over the EEC budget, that will be a step towards greater accountability and representation.

If the anti-Marketeers were heeded, there would be more power for the Commission and the bureaucrats and less power for the elected representatives of the people of this country. Let us remember that the elected Members of the European Parliament sit as representatives for the people of this country.

The nitpicking, small-minded, critical tone of EEC debates is sometimes sad to witness. Strengthening the European Parliament is another crucial step on the road towards greater European integration. In 1945 the second great war of this century came to an end. Less than 30 years later, all the main European countries which fought that war, on the Continent that shaped the rest of the world, were joined in a Community which banished for ever war between them.

That was a political miracle of astonishing dimensions. For a decade, however, little else has happened. The Community has expanded and become a formidable trading block but progress towards the accountability of its institutions — that is what is enshrined by the move towards budgetary accountability in the Parliament, and towards political union—has moved at a snail's pace.

To most people, Europe represents the stuff of today's debate. The Community is steeped in obscure financial haggling and there is constant fire from hon. Members on both sides of the House who argue that it is wasting our resources and usurping our national sovereignty. They do not realise that Britain's real sovereignty, our say in determining our own destiny, has already been usurped by the bigger political and economic powers in today's world. European co-operation is the only way of regaining a say in the major issues that affect us all.

Mr. Dykes: I agree with my hon. Friend. Is it not really sad to reflect that the only places where such absurd debates still occur are in this country, in Demark in its slightly eccentric way, particularly given the recent resolution in its Parliament, and in Greece which is very esoteric and bloody-minded anyway?

Mr. Harvey: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend, although for safety's sake I shall not associate myself with his remarks about the Greeks.

For 10 years, we have seen Europe ignored as a priority and degenerate into a series of annual bazaars for the allocation of EEC resources, coupled with well-meaning but always frustrated calls for the reform of the Community budget. The wider issues on which Europe can and should be making its voice heard are forgotten. On each of those wider issues there are 12 faint EEC voices —not one strong one—all of which are lost in the roar of super-power dialogue. The only way that we can regain our sovereignty and our say on those grave issues is to act with greater unity.

Considerable effort has been made to find a common European view on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Those efforts are to be applauded. How much more important is it that a common position be adopted on the greatest issue facing the Continent since the cold war began — that of controlling the arms race before it enters a new, dangerous and vastly expensive phase. Today, the Russian fear of the American strategic defence initiative——

Mr. Deakins: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I find it a little difficult to relate the remarks of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) to the Supplementary Estimate. I am sure that he will be able to relate them to the Estimate.

Mr. Harvey: I was just about to return to that matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The arms issue is one upon which Europe should begin to have a voice. What is Europe's position? My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has properly expressed his reservations about American reliance on the Maginot line in space——

Mr. Deakins: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that you had given a ruling that in such a truncated debate the hon. Gentleman should bring his speech into line with the purpose of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member for Clywd South-West will relate his remarks to the subject of the Estimate. It is a short debate.

Mr. Harvey: I shall do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was about to conclude. The debate should touch upon the issue of European union. I feel that the narrow issue that we have allowed ourselves to discuss——

Mr. Thurnham: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend return to the subject that we are discussing. He made the interesting point that part of the expenditure was necessary because Portugal, one of the poorest members of the enlarged Community, would be a net contributor. This country is now one of the poorest members of the Community and we are a contributor. Is that one of the reasons why we are so unhappy about this increased expenditure? Does not the breakdown in budgetary control go against the need for unity which I believe he said was the Common Market's greatest strength?

Mr. Harvey: I associate myself wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend's remarks. For most people, Europe is represented by the kind of detail that we have been discussing and is not seen as the uplifting ideal that it once was. I hope that it is not too late to revive the ideal of a united and respected Europe and Community whose values, civilisation and good sense exceed those of the great powers that dominate today's bipolar world and which can act as a bridge between them. In that context, I welcome recent moves towards European foreign policy co-operation.

If Europe can find a common voice in the world, economic integration and the greater accountability of EEC institutions will follow at their own pace. In the meantime, the House should vote to support the greater accountability of EEC institutions to the people's elected representatives. Let us strengthen powers of the European Parliament. Let us strengthen the cause of Europe and democratic accountability, and let us approve these Supplementary Estimates.

6.33 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) that we are discussing a narrow technical point. It is a matter of considerable principle. There are a number of

[Mr. John Townend]

matters about the current EEC budget and the proposals before the House that I find deeply disturbing. Clearly, time will not allow me to deal with them all.

If the actions being taken in the court by the United Kingdom and the other four countries fail, the whole agreement negotiated by the United Kingdom when it approved the lifting of the VAT ceiling from 1 to 1·4 per cent. will become worthless.

Budget discipline was one of the salient points of that agreement. We were assured in the House by the Prime Minister that that agreement would give us effective budget discipline. If the Assembly's action is upheld in the court, it will drive a coach and horses through the agreement. Those of us who opposed the increases in net resources will be completely vindicated. Will my hon. Friend tell the House what contingency plans the Government have should they lose the court case? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) that it is not beyond the realms of possibility that they could lose it.

I wish to deal with the so-called ex gratia payment into court. I found it disturbing to be told by my hon. Friend the Minister before the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service and in the House today that he had been advised by his legal advisers that if we did not make an ex gratia payment our position in the case would be jeopardised. That is not just against the tradition of British justice; it is against natural justice.

Mr. Budgen: It may be part of European justice.

Mr. Townend: I sincerely hope not. My hon. Friend is a little cynical. The Government are implying that the court is incapable of making a fair and balanced judgment on the issue before it—whether it is a legal or an illegal budget—but will be influenced by whether this country makes an ex gratia payment in respect of what we submit is an illegal demand. If that is how European justice works, how can we ever expect fair and impartial decisions to come out of the European Court?

I should like to deal with the subject of interest. It is inconceivable to anyone brought up with the idea of equity before the courts to believe that if we make an ex gratia payment in advance and win we are not paid interest on that payment, but if we do not make a payment and lose we pay a 20 per cent. penal rate of interest. That is unjust and indefensibe.

Mr. Marlow: As I understand it, my hon. Friend is a successful business man. We have two alternatives. We believe that we are right and that we will succeed in the court. If we withhold the money and turn out to be wrong, we will have to pay the money plus the interest. That, however, is a small chance. If we believe that we are right, and we are found to be right, we shall not have paid the money. My hon. Friend is a business man. If it were his own money, which course would he take in those circumstances?

Mr. Townend: I should take the same course as my hon. Friend.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the great sums of money involved in our contribution to the EEC, the interest on £18 million, even at 20 per cent., is peanuts? Even if we have to pay that, if we make an effective gesture against EEC overspending it will be a small price to pay.

Mr. Townend: My hon. Friend has made a relevant point. He should remember that the total cost is not 20 per cent., because we would save the interest on the money that we would have to pay through the gilt market. The net cost would probably be only 8 per cent.

Unless my hon. Friend's reply is far more convincing than his opening speech, I, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) will find that I cannot support the Government in the Lobby tonight.

6.39 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): On the Third Reading debate of the EC Finance Bill the then Minister of State, Treasury, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) was asked by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) to

"give a commitment to the House . . . that there will be no soft loans, intergovernmental agreements, whip rounds or any other form of temporary subvention to the Community".

The Minister, of course, had the sense to decline, although he did say:

"provided that the budgetary discipline that has been agreed is observed . . . there will be no need to come back to the House for another intergovernmental agreement."

He later added:

"I find it impossible to envisage circumstances in which the Government will come back to the House."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 1985; Vol. 84, c. 185-188.]

Neither the Minister nor we imagined this rather extraordinary set of circumstances in which the Government would come back to the House to demand a Supplementary Estimate. It is apparently designed, dare I say, to sweeten the judges so that they will judge in our favour.

One of the questions that hon. Members have rightly pursued in this debate is what is the exact nature of the European Court. The Treasury itself stated in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that payment of this kind would

"enable the United Kingdom to present its arguments before the Court in the most attractive light, a factor seen as an important advantage".

The Minister will have to tell us a great deal more about how he and his officials view the workings of the European Court in regard to this advance payment. The Government should tell us more about the nature of their own legal advice — they certainly have not been so coy about revealing the nature of their legal advice in the recent past. The Minister has many questions to answer.

The Minister, in his opening remarks, said that it was necessary for the United Kingdom to act in the same way as the other Council members who are also pursuing this case before the court. Why did the United Kingdom, together with the other European members of the Council, not come to a quite different view? Why did they not agree that no one should pay until the court case was settled? Surely that would have been possible by agreement. Why was that not done?

The reason for the advance payment, before the court case has been settled — as the Minister knows well, despite assurances given to the House — is that extra funds will be needed anyway. When the Minister was pressed about the possibility of withholding payment if the

judgment goes in our favour, he said that this was possible. The Minister did not say that we would be in a situation where we would withhold payments of that kind.

The Minister and the Government know that this will not be the first time that the Government will come back to the House this year and ask for more money. This £18 million is only the first request. The spokesman for the Commission, Mr. Junker, has already said that there would be a supplementary budget required during the course of 1986. When will that happen and how much will it be? The Minister and the Government cannot continue to rely on the claim that budget discipline has been achieved and that there will be no need to come back to the House.

There are two issues on which the Government might find themselves in difficulties. First, there is the question of the regional and social funds. It is true that that is non-obligatory expenditure, but the expenditure which the European Assembly added to the budget was added for two reasons. First, it was added because over 50 per cent. of the regional and social funds element of the budget refers to past commitments. That means that this year the Commission may not be able to meet promises that have already been made for payments under the heading of the regional and social funds. The second reason is that the European Assembly takes the view that agricultural spending, running at 70 per cent. of the budget, absorbs far too much of the budget.

If the regional and social funds run out of money and if we refuse to pay any additional money into the European budget we shall lose because much of that money would come to us. Have the Government thought about this problem and if so what conclusions have they reached?

The Government have refused to face up to the problems of agricultural spending. During the course of this debate it has already been stated that any fall in the dollar-ecu exchange rate below 1·2 will lead to budget increases in terms of export refund payments. A fall of 4 per cent. has already taken place this year and that means another £400 million on export refund payments alone. No agreement on cereal prices has been reached but this is not the only problem which agricultural spending faces.

In the newspapers this weekend there were reports about our food surplus, which increased by 75 per cent. to £1·4 billion last year. Inevitably that means a rise in the cost of servicing the stores of such surplus stocks. *The Observer* reported that the European Commission is planning to dump £4 billion worth of surplus food on to the world market over the next three years. The cost of that would be at least £2 billion. A secret European Commission report was referred to as the source—since it has already appeared in *The Observer* it is perhaps not all that secret. The Minister should tell us whether these reports are true. Is it true that the cost of dumping and the costs of servicing the storage of the stocks will rise in Britain and in the whole EEC to the extent of £2 billion? If so, agricultural spending will certainly run out of hand again. What will the Government do about this?

Will the Government come before the House with demands for yet more money for the worst possible reason — for the continuing, obscene food mountains and money for the practice of dumping surplus products on the world food markets, with dire consequences for Third world countries? That can only increase starvation and the difficulties that many Third world countries face.

Why will the Minister not come clean with the House and tell us that the £18 million is to be paid into the European Commission not just to make our case appear in the most attractive light but as a kind of down payment on the calls that will be made on our resources in the coming months of 1986? Why will the Government not admit that there is no such thing as budgetary discipline? Budgetary discipline does not exist because the Government have done nothing to reform agricultural policy within the Community.

If the Government persist in believing in the existence of the budgetary discipline they are the only member Government who continue to do so. The European Commission has abandoned any such behief. The Commission's annual report on agricultural spending last year made it quite clear that:

"Even in those sectors in which substantial reform has already been achieved—e.g. milk products and wine—much remains to be done by way of stock reduction and supply management."

That is a polite way of saying that the reforms have done nothing to reduce agricultural spending, but rather it will get out of hand, as it has with cereals.

The £18 million is only the first instalment. It is a sweetener to the court. The Minister should tell us more about that and when he proposes to demand more money from the House for obscene and wasteful farm spending. He should come clean with the House tonight.

6.50 pm

Mr. Brooke: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate.

This has been an excellent and forceful debate. Some hon. Members have asked questions about Government policy with regard to the disputed 1986 budget, and others have been more anxious to discuss our parliamentary procedures in such a case. I shall do my best to comment on as many of the issues that have been raised as possible.

I should like to underline three fundamental points in my opening speech. First, the question at issue is nothing less than the balance of power between the European Parliament on the one hand and the Council and national Parliaments on the other. Secondly, the key to resolving the issue satisfactorily is winning the court case. Thirdly, the procedures that we have adopted for seeking parliamentary approval are those recommended by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in the previous Parliament. I trust that the critics of those procedures will not overlook that fact.

I would not accuse the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) of the Latin American delegate's technique of putting in the margin, "Weak point—shout," but amid his charges of humbug and pedantry he glossed lightly over the illegality that the European Parliament had committed. He either does not understand the process of budget making, or he is saying that breaking the law does not matter if the infringement is small. I am glad that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins), with a reference to ship money, issued a powerful corrective from the Opposition Back Benches. Of course it could be argued that this is the thin edge of the wedge, but the critical fact is that what the Parliament has done is illegal, and we intend to reverse that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) mentioned the dilemma of our having a short time, which made more difficult the handling of a complex matter. It also made more difficult the Government's

[Mr. Brooke]

handling of the case in terms of whether a Consolidated Fund Bill could be introduced. The dilemma was serious. As for timing, the preoccupation, apart from the dislike of paying interest, is with not finding ourselves being sued for interest on a payment that we were making without prejudice and ex gratia.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brooke: I am sorry, but no. I have very little time.

As for the method, which was recommended by the Select Committee, the use of the Contingencies Fund is dictated by urgent cases. It is difficult to envisage a more urgent case or one for which the fund would be more relevant.

Mr. Higgins: My hon. Friend said that we were making the payment without prejudice. Without prejudice to what? As we understand it, we are to make a payment but cannot get it back.

Mr. Brooke: We are making it without prejudice in the sense that we are making it not under the authority of the European Communities Act 1972, but under a separate head. In paying, we are saying that we regard the demand as improper, but we need to pay it in the context of the court cases.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing mentioned page 791 of "Erskine May" and overriding the limits. The payment is not obligatory under existing legislation, but nor is it ruled out, which is the critical feature, as I think my right hon. Friend implied. The Estimate is brought forward on a separate basis, but not one which requires legislation to override the 1972 Act.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) criticised the Council of Ministers for its responses, but, in the process, ignored the issue of budgetary discipline, and was, I fear, joined in that by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) for emphasising that the issues adduced by others as excuses for the European Parliament were simply justifications for illegality.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend has kindly said that I helped him by saying that the payment was illegal. Why should we make an illegal payment which we shall not get back and which the Commission will spend for us?

Mr. Brooke: What I said, and what I thought my hon. Friend joined me on, was that the European Parliament's act was illegal.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow asked two questions. One related to section 173 of the European Community Treaty and the basis for our case. The very fact that the Parliament is not mentioned there raises the possibility of the Council's action being inadmissible. That is the basis for bringing our own case. The answer to his second question is that we could sue the Commission, and can still sue it, but there is no prospect of the Council of Ministers doing so. In that respect, we should be acting independently. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the Assembly overspending. I would not have thought, from what he said, that none of his colleagues in the Assembly had voted against the illegal budget, but I agree that he is not responsible for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) mentioned the disagreeable time spent before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I did not think that it was disagreeable at all. I thoroughly enjoyed it and look forward to another occasion. He threw the word Communautaire at me. I suspect that it might well be an unparliamentary expression. The critical thing from the Government's point of view and in the context of the future of the Community is that we win the case. We believe that that can best be achieved by maintaining common cause among member Governments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Harvey) emphasised the importance to the future of Europe of winning the case. In that respect, he was joined by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), although my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington disagrees about the best way in which to win the case. The disagreement is simply one of tactics.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) achieved the considerable feat of speaking for 10 minutes on behalf of the Opposition without referring once, as far as I am aware, to the illegality of the Parliament. She raised other issues which are relevant to the debate, but did not tackle the central one, which is the basis for the Government's action. I am happy to deny on behalf of the Government that we are bringing forward this Estimate because extra funds will be needed anyway. We are bringing the Estimate forward to assist the conduct of our case in the court and to reinforce our expectation of winning.

Dr. McDonald: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Brooke: Not at this stage. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing asked why we were making the payment to support our case. We are anxious to maintain a common approach among member Governments in this nexus of cases. We do not want to pre-empt the court. As for the interim application, we are uniquely bringing forward the motion.

When I referred to high ground, my metaphor was as much military as moral. We are anxious to remain the plaintiffs in these cases, not the defendant.

In conclusion, I express the hope that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will vote in favour of the special Supplementary Estimate. The procedures for which the Government are seeking approval are those recommended by no less an authority than the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in the previous Parliament.

Several hon. Members have expressed surprise at the nature of the Government's legal advice, but to my memory no one has suggested—or at least no one has convinced me—that we should ignore that advice.

The balance between the Government's argument and that of some of my hon. Friends is that they believe that one act of political will in withholding payment is crucial to the future of Europe, and the Government believe that another act of political will is critical, which is acting in unison with our friends in the Community to defeat that illegality by the Parliament in the court. I ask the House——

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question pursuant to the Order of the House, 31 January.*

The House divided: Ayes 332, Noes 200.

Division No. 58] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bigge-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hancock, Michael
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Maclennan, Robert
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wainwright, R.
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis

Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Carol Mather and
Mr. Robert Boscawen

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Body, Sir Richard
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Budgen, Nick
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dover, Den
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Fry, Peter
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hawksley, Warren
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E.
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Proctor, K. Harvey
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ron Davies and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That a supplementary sum, not exceeding £135,917,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1986 for expenditure by the Treasury in connection with payments to the Budget of the European Communities not covered by direct charges on the Consolidated Fund under section 2(3) of the European Communities Act 1972, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 177.

Australia Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

7.13 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): I have it in command from the Queen to acquaint the House that Her Majesty, having been informed of the purport of the Bill, has consented to place her prerogative and interest, so far as they are affected by the Bill, at the disposal of Parliament for the purposes of the Bill.

7.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Our relations with Australia are of the greatest importance to this country. The Bill will, when enacted, confirm the United Kingdom's recognition of Australia's present-day status as a proud and independent nation. The removal of the old residual constitutional links reflects this country's affection for Australia and is therefore a cause for satisfaction.

The Bill is at the request and with the consent of the Parliament and Government of the Commonwealth of Australia. The request and consent was expressed in the Australia (Request and Consent) Act 1985, enacted in December 1985 by the Commonwealth Parliament in Australia. That legislation came about as a result of legislation enacted in September and October 1985 by the legislatures of each Australian state. In the passage through state legislatures and the federal Parliament, there was unanimous support from all Australian political parties to the proposals. I am happy to report that the same unanimity was evident in the passage of our own Bill through another place.

The purpose of the Bill is to remove the remaining constitutional links that still exist between the United Kingdom and the Australian states. The links have their origin in the way that the Commonwealth of Australia was created in 1901 as a federation of what were, until then, individual British colonies. On federation, a number of powers and functions were conferred upon the Commonwealth authorities, but the states, as the then colonies had become, retained many of their previous powers and functions. In law, and in many respects, they retained their status as colonies of the United Kingdom. With that status they remained subject to certain restraints and controls from the United Kingdom which, with the development of Australia to independent statehood, has clearly become inappropriate.

The quasi-colonial status of the Australian states meant that, in respect of those states, Her Majesty was sovereign in right of the United Kingdom; thus, when exercising her powers in relation to the states, Her Majesty is formally advised by her United Kingdom Ministers. Under the Bill, Her Majesty will continue to be sovereign in respect of the states, but no longer in respect of the United Kingdom. Instead, the Bill provides that when Her Majesty is exercising powers and functions in respect of the states, she will do so on the advice of Australian state Premiers. This mirrors Her Majesty's position in relation to Australian Commonwealth matters when she is advised by her Australian Commonwealth Ministers. The Bill makes no other change in the position of Her Majesty as Queen of Australia.

The Australian Government's request is made in accordance with section 4 of the Statute of Westminster 1931, which states:

"No Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom passed after the commencement of this Act shall extend, or be deemed to extend, to a Dominion as part of the law of that Dominion, unless it is expressly declared in that Act that that Dominion has requested, and consented to, the enactment thereof."

The details of the Bill are the result of extensive consultations between the Australian state and Commonwealth Governments and, more recently, between the Australian Commonwealth and United Kingdom Governments. Her Majesty approved the proposals in the middle of last year. Once Her Majesty had approved them, all the states and the Commonwealth of Australia passed legislation in their own legislatures. Following Royal Assent to the Australia (Request and Consent) Act 1985, passed by the Commonwealth Parliament, Mr. Hawke wrote to the Prime Minister formally seeking enactment at Westminster of complementary legislation. That is the Bill before the House.

The Bill is drafted to mirror the Australian legislation precisely. Briefly, the Bill will, in clause 1, remove the British Parliament's power to make laws for Australian states — thus it achieves the complete legislative independence of Australia from the United Kingdom. By virtue of clause 10, the Bill will terminate the responsibility of the Government of the United Kingdom for the government of any Australian state.

The Bill will also remove certain restraints which at present exist in relation to the legislative powers of Australian states. By clause 8, it will remove certain powers of Her Majesty, as the Queen of the United Kingdom, exercisable on the advice of United Kingdom Ministers, to disallow or to suspend the operation of state laws. By clause 3, it will remove certain restrictions, for example, under the Colonial Laws Validity Act 1865, on the legislative powers of Australian states.

Turning to judicial matters, clause 11 will terminate appeals to the Privy Council from state courts. However, it will not affect an appeal instituted before the commencement of this legislation, or an appeal for which leave has been given before the commencement of the Act. Those will continue to be dealt with in the same manner as before, as if this legislation had not been enacted.

As regards the powers and functions of Her Majesty and governors in respect of states, clause 7 makes new provisions. Her Majesty's representative in each state continues to be the governor. It is the governor alone who will exercise the powers of Her Majesty, except on the appointment or the termination of the appointment of a governor, and at times when the Queen is personally present in the state.

On those two matters, the Bill provides for the Queen to act on the advice of the Premier of the state concerned, although when she is personally present in a state, any such advice to the Queen would be tendered only in accordance with the mutual and prior agreement between the Queen and the Premier. That arrangement was agreed between the Australian federal and state authorities and the Palace.

Finally, in clauses 13 and 14 the Bill amends the constitution Acts of Queensland and Western Australia respectively. The constitutions of those two states are the only ones that include specific provisions relating to the appointment of their governors. The clauses are

[Mr. Tim Eggar]

consequential upon termination of the powers and responsibilities of United Kingdom Ministers in respect of states.

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join the Government in welcoming the Bill. It represents and embodies Australian wishes. All parties and all state legislatures in the Commonwealth Parliament support the proposals outlined in the Bill. As I said at the beginning of my speech, legislation has been enacted in all state and Commonwealth legislatures smoothly and without controversy. It is right that this House should agree to the request of the representatives of the Australian people for the removal of these residual constitutional links.

The decision to propose changes has not been made lightly. While it is true that the Bill will remove certain, largely formal, legal links, it will in no way weaken the deep practical relationship between our two countries. Moreover, it will substitute new arrangements that accurately reflect Australia's well-established status as a modern and sovereign nation. The Bill also acknowledges Australia's proud independence under its Queen and the true balance of our relationship today.

I commend the Bill to the House.

7.22 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I thank the Minister for his clear and helpful speech. It is obvious that the Government have not materially altered their position since Baroness Young outlined the Bill in another place on 16 July.

In no way will the Opposition seek to delay or amend the Bill. On the contrary, we shall do everything that we can to speed its passage through the House in the hope that Her Majesty the Queen can proclaim its coming into force when she visits Australia early next month.

On one level, it would in any event be quite unrealistic for us to raise obstacles. It would be inappropriate to seek unilaterally to amend matters which have been agreed by all Australians, and which should properly be within their competence. We note the unanimous approval in Australia, the passage through the state legislatures in September and October last year and the Royal Assent in Australia on 4 December. It has been agreed by all parties in Australia, by all states—even by Western Australia, which in the 1930s had a secessionist movement—and by the Commonwealth Government — even those individuals who have been most loyal to the old Commonwealth relationship. One contrasts the reception in this House for the Bill with that for the Bill that eventually became the Canada Act.

With such unanimity of approval, how can we oppose the Bill? It is the recognition of a change in relationship from the time of the establishment of the Australian Commonwealth in 1901—the residual element of that quasi-colonial relationship whose very existence contains at least a chance of potential conflict between the Crown, our legislature and Australia.

Nevertheless, there were positive elements in the old relationship, especially in the co-operative development of the common law. All Bar students and civil practitioners will be aware of the distinguished Chief Justice of the Australian High Court, Sir Owen Dixon, and of the Wagon Mound case in 1961, which decisively altered the concept of liability in our civil law, defining the limits of liability for a negligent act. All that arose from a mishap in the harbour at Sydney. The personal relationships between members of the Bar in Australia and this country will continue, and I am sure that the legal co-operation generally will also remain.

The tide has passed, and, as the Minister said, it is quite anachronistic that, for example, Her Majesty the Queen, in exercising powers in the Australian states, acts on the advice of United Kingdom Ministers. When the Bill becomes law, in exercising such functions the Queen will act on the advice of Australian state premiers. Another example of an anachronism is that this House should have certain functions in respect of legislation for the states of Australia.

There is a new reality. There is the development of two wholly independent, nations, in no way dependent the one upon the other, enjoying a warm and close bilateral relationship — two proud democracies, homes of the common law. When problems arise on a bilateral level, such as those following the McClelland commission report on nuclear tests in Australia, those potential forces of an explosive conflict will, I am confident, be settled on a basis of mutual good will and long-standing friendship.

We do not need these remaining residual quasi-colonial ties to define our relationship with Australia—something that is based on far broader and wider foundations. We have fought together, we have talked together as parliamentary colleagues in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, we mix together, we have a network of family links between this country and Australia—there can hardly be a family in the United Kingdom which does not have some personal link with Australia—and we play together.

My only slight criticism of the Bill is that our negotiators have not done a tough enough job, because there is no reciprocity. Perhaps, as a swap for giving the Australians their constitution, we should have insisted that Alan Border remain in this country for five years.

A new relationship has indeed developed. When Sir Robert Menzies used to say that he was British to his bootstraps, that was anachronistic even then, as I cannot imagine that many British people were wearing bootstraps. We now look forward to the British-Australian bicentennial celebrations to be held next year. The old is dead, long live the new relationship. At last, Australia has achieved her legislative independence.

7.30 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): It is welcome and uplifting to take part in a debate in which both sides of the House seem united in wishing progress to a Bill. I compliment the Under-Secretary of State on giving a new definition to the term "Second Reading", in that he read for the second time what his noble Friend had read so well in another place, while inserting one or two interesting adverbs, which were recognised by the occupants of the Opposition Benches.

On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, who are so much better represented proportionally in the Chamber this evening than are the Government or the official Opposition, I am pleased to say that the Bill has the full support of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties. It was anachronistic to have judicial and residual administrative rights over Australian legislation, and we welcome their termination.

Australia is a mature and civilised country which I have had the privilege and pleasure of visiting on a number of occasions. The last occasion on which I visited it was as a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. If ever there was a country which deserved to look after its own destiny without unnecessary interference from us, it is Australia.

It used to be said in olden days that one could tell the difference between an Australian and yoghurt because only one of them had culture. That is no longer so, and the arts in Australia flourish now as probably in no other Commonwealth country. The Australian cinema is enjoying a marvellously exciting new life. The Melbourne opera house is one of the architectural gems of the world, and the Australian theatre flourishes. Perhaps more important is the fact that the Australian arts are customer orientated. When I was in Melbourne, even matinees of quite heavy operas were fully attended, with people waiting for returned seats.

In sport, Australians need no interference or guidance from us. There is perhaps a moment for gloating over cricket, but in all other sports they are almost fearless. Their racing is brilliant, in that they have removed elitism from it. Spectators do not necessarily wear hats, and they are not barred from going into various enclosures by virtue of how much they have paid. The bravery and knowledge of their commentators is brilliant as well. Our BBC and ITV commentators will never commit themselves if horses finish within half a length of one another. The Australian commentators call results when they are by a whisker, and they are steadily proved right.

I observed the Australian prison service and found it to be excellent. Their rate of recidivism is very much lower than ours, and there is genuine understanding, and investment in, the well-being of prisoners. I spoke to the director of prisons in the state of Victoria, and he explained that it was the state that took away individuals' liberty and that the prison service tried to replace that with dignity.

Australian agriculture needs no help from us. The CPA delegation visited an avocado plantation in Western Australia which was irrigated by means of a computer, with one man sitting in a hut with a hydrometer measuring the dampness of the earth and spraying it where necessary.

There is oil in the north and the wine from the Hunter valley in the south can take the place of any wine in the world. The state parliaments are decently run and, unlike us, sit no more often than is necessary. The Senators are well paid and they all, as well as Members of the state Parliament, enjoy free rail travel anywhere in Australia. That is something from which we should learn.

The Bill will have an effect on the conferment of honours on Australian citizens. I am pleased to say that that was not picked up by anyone in another place, and one tries in this place to be to some extent original when debating something which began in another place. Clause 7(5) reads:

> "The advice to Her Majesty in relation to the exercise of the powers and functions of Her Majesty in respect of a State shall be tendered by the Premier of the State",

which means that no longer will honours have to be filtered through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. From now on they will be recommended by the state premiers to Her Majesty, who in her capacity as the Queen of Australia will confer honours on her Australian people.

I believe that our friendship will be stronger if we allow Australia, a mature and civilised nation, to run its own ship of state. It has shown the ability to do so, and I do not believe that anything that has happened recently on our side of the ocean is likely to persuade it that when it comes to governing a country we have all the answers. I welcome the Bill, and my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will support it.

7.37 pm

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I shall not indulge in a travelogue, like the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud). I found it fascinating, however, to hear about his racing experiences in Australia.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said in introducing this small but important Bill, it is largely a formal measure. One is tempted to ask why the formal powers have been retained for so long. A similar sort of Bill came before us a short while ago that dealt with Canada. I do not know of the intricacies that lie behind such measures; but perhaps we should have proceeded jointly instead of taking a piecemeal approach. One of the most comforting and heartening features of the debate is the complete agreement on this measure that has been expressed from both Front Benches. It is comforting and heartening also to know that the Bill is in accord with the thinking of the separate states in Australia. That must be good.

I detect that everyone in this place believes that it is essential to retain full links with the Commonwealth, especially with the old Commonwealth. Our ties with Australia remain strong and they are not to be underestimated. Nor are they to be neglected. It must be understood that they should never be taken for granted. There have been suggestions in the past on the part of Australia that it should break from us while still retaining a loose association within the Commonwealth. Having been to Australia, like the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East, I detect an enormous amount of good will among Australians; that is evidenced by the many young people who come to Britain from Australia. Many of the younger generation still regard Britain as their motherland.

The ties that we are debating are anachronistic and they serve no useful purpose. It is right that the statute book should not be littered with laws that no one has any intention of implementing. Therefore, it is wise that we should be taking the step that is marked by the Bill. Wherever I go—I am sure that this will be echoed by all hon. Members—I find that there remains enormous goodwill between Australia and Britain. I am a member of the British delegation to the Council of Europe and it is interesting that among the most regular visitors from parliaments outside Europe are those who come from Australia. It is usual for Australia to send a strong team to Strasbourg about once a year to participate in debates and to make contact with European parliamentarians of the 21 nations which form the Council of Europe. That is all to the good, and we should do everything we can to encourage it.

Australia has enormous potential. It has a tiny population compared with its land mass. Long after our time it will be much further developed than it is today and with a larger population, when certain climatic barriers have been broken. Australia is a formidable and essential

[Sir Dudley Smith]

part of the Commonwealth. The Bill has a great deal to commend it, not least because it gives us an opportunity to emphasise the strength of our ties with Australia.

7.40 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): In 1982 the *Daily Telegraph* carried a story written by Nicholas Comfort, a perceptive analyst, in which he said:

"Politicians at Westminster are bracing themselves for a Bill to make changes in the Australian Constitution, in the hope that it will arouse less controversy than last winter's debates on Canada's."

About that time I opened a file on Australia, and four years later the file is thin because the contrast between the Australia Bill and the Canada Bill is enormous. I suspect that Australian politicians, seeing how badly the issue of patriating Canada's constitution was handled by the Canadian Federal Government, resolved to ensure that when, eventually, legislation was introduced for Australia, it would not be subjected to the same intense debates.

If the public was asked whether it appreciated that Britain still had a residual responsibility for Australia, many people would be as bemused as hon. Members were in the late 1980's when it was pointed out that we had a significant residual responsibility for Canada.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): The hon. Gentleman is more than five years out on his dates. We legislated for Canada in the 1980's.

Mr. George: If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard* he will see that I said that the issue surfaced in the late 1970s. In 1979 I presented a lobby of 250 Canadian aboriginals. The Canadian issue scarred Canadians and the parliamentarians involved. Fortunately, the House is not being put through the same traumas with Australia. Australian politicians realised that they should not go through that process and did what Canadian politicians did not do, which was to secure compliance among all the federating elements in the Australian political system and all political parties, so that there was unaminity in presenting the legislation.

The contrast is startling. The Canadian Prime Minister sought not simply to patriate the constitution, but to alter the balance between federal and provincial Governments. That caused considerable opposition in both Canada and the United Kingdom, and resulted in long hours of debate. Eventually the federal Government of Canada had to climb down and secure a different agreement with the provinces. The Australian position is very different. Although some of the characters involved in the debate five years ago are present today, the circumstances are completely different.

There was a time when such a debate would not be automatically peaceful, as clearly it will be today. The precursor to today's legislation may have been the traumas of the mid-1970s which involved the Governor-General and the dismissal of the Government of Gough Whitlam. Fortunately, there has been agreement in Australia, although there is the issue of republicanism, but that matter is exclusively for Australians. This final constitutional tie is being severed, and we wish the new arrangements all good fortune.

The issue of Australian aboriginals—those who are left — will not be debated today, or in our future debates. That is not to say that we regard the position of Australian aboriginals as something Australians can view with pride and pleasure. However, Australian aboriginals, for whatever reason, have not lobbied British parliamentarians. If they do not see any enhancement of their status through debates in the Houses of Parliament, that is up to them. But I certainly would not like it to be thought that the Australian record was any better than that of Canada, because in many respects it is worse.

The Australians have a legacy of Westminster government which they have nurtured and developed in their own unique way. Indirectly, Australia had colonies, and Australians can be proud of the political system that they have established and of the system that they have bequeathed to their former colony of Papua New Guinea. A few months ago when the Prime Minister there was defeated on a vote of no confidence, he resigned, for the second time, and took his place on the Opposition Benches. The success of that political system may be because Australia, not the United Kingdom, was the colonial power.

The number of column inches in *Hansard* devoted to Australia will be limited. The measure is not being subjected to intense political debate, which is welcome. I presume that the remaining stages will be as uneventful as the Second Reading because Australians have proceeded more intelligently than their fellow Commonwealth parliamentarians in North America.

The House should wish the Bill well. It has secured unanimity here and in Australia. It is right that the Australian Government have introduced the legislation, and I hope that their future political developments will be successful.

7.48 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): During more than 25 years in the House I have seen incompetently drafted Bills causing unanticipated troubles. I do not admire those who draft Bills incompetently. The Hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) does less than justice to the institutes of learning, which he has not dignified by his presence, in believing that British people have been wholly ignorant of the constitutional position between Australia and the United Kingdom. I should have thought that every university, except for the one which he has illuminated by his academic advice, and a huge number of people were well aware of the constitutional position of the British Parliament vis-à-vis the Commonwealth of Australia.

I rise to point out that the word "Commonwealth" is understood wholly differently in Australia and in the United Kingdom. It so happens that tonight we are passing United Kingdom legislation. In the United Kingdom the word "Commonwealth" means the British Commonwealth. I notice that the hon. Members for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) are not listening. I ask for their attention, because I am not making a party political point, but am trying to ensure that when we pass the last definitive Act which affects the great Commonwealth of Australia, we get it right instead of wrong.

Mr. Anderson: Surely it is for the Government Front Bench to enlighten the hon. Gentleman. In clause 16, the interpretation clause, the Commonwealth is properly defined.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Indeed, and nit-picking lawyers would agree with the hon. Gentleman: but he would have been wiser to wait until I had finished before making such inappropriate observations. My reading of the Bill has also reached clause 16. In fact, I have reached later in clause 16 than has the hon. Gentleman, to where it says:

"'State' means a State of the Commonwealth and includes a new State".

I suppose that when we were all at primary school we knew the silly games, which were not even played by parliamentary drafting lawyers, where one turns to page 5, then page 17, back to page 6 and on to page 30 before one discovers what is intended.

I am making a substantial point, in that, in clause 1 "Commonwealth" is not used in the sense in which it is always used in the House, as in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is being used in a different sense, which is wholly appropriate within the Commonwealth of Australia, but is not appropriate in United Kingdom legislation. We should not have to wait until clause 16 to discover that the sense in which the incompetent draftsman of the Bill used the word "Commonwealth" in clause 1 is not the sense in which it is normally used in the House, in another place, by our courts, in official designations, and by Her Majesty when she opens the Commonwealth Conference. It is used in the Australian internal sense meaning the "Commonwealth of Australia."

I am not making a Committee point, but I think it would have been more appropriate if the incompetent draftsman of the Bill had put "Commonwealth of Australia" in cluse 1 and had also given a definition in clause 16 reading:

"'State' means a state of the Commonwealth of Australia and includes a new state."

I am putting this on record because, although courts often say that what is spoken in debate does not constitute the law, they refer to it as evidence of the will of Parliament.

We have all suffered so much from incompetently drafted legislation that I wish to use this occasion to protest against an example of it. It would have been so easy to say:

"No Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed after the commencement of this Act shall extend, or be deemed to extend, to the Commonwealth of Australia, to a State or to a Territory as part of the law of the Commonwealth of Australia, or of the state or of the Territory".

Mr. Anderson *rose*——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Does the jack-in-the-box on the Opposition Front Bench want to intervene?

Mr. Anderson: Putting aside clause 16, do we not have a definition even before clause 1, in the title of the Bill:

"An Act to give effect to a request by the Parliament and Government of the Commonwealth of Australia"?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: We do not have a definition there at all. The first operative clause is clause 1. If the hon. Gentleman was a little more informed on such matters, he would know that the preamble does not constrain content. I am not a lawyer, for which I thank God frequently, and I hope successfully.

Mr. Buchan: There is an interpretation clause—clause 16, which clearly defines the Commonwealth as the "Commonwealth of Australia" and the state as being a

"State of the Commonwealth and includes a new state".

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: That has already been referred to. If the hon. Gentleman had been listening rather than chattering to his hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East, he would have heard his hon. Friend make that point a short while ago.

I am saying that it is wholly unsatisfactory, shoddy and inappropriate draftmanship to have to wait until clause 16 before one discovers what should be in clause 1. I suppose that as an ex-junior Minister the hon. Member for Paisley, South feels it necessary to support incompetent draftsmanship, because he was a Minister who introduced incompetently drafted Bills to the House. If he had listened to what has been going on, he would have been apprised of the point that I am making.

I think it is sad that an important Bill, which brings a wholly relevant and deserved dignity to the Commonwealth of Australia, should be sullied by such mean lawyers' drafting, which does not say what it means. One should be able to read a Bill and know what it means as one goes through it, instead of having to play the silly game of referring from one clause and one part of a clause to another until one understands.

My appeal is for clear and competent drafting of Bills rather than such incompetence, which is only just legally complete, but is not what it could have been or should have been. That is the point I wish to place on record. If the Bill should be tested, as it could be in the British court, an Australian court or, in cases of conflict of jurisdiction, in any other court in the world, I would prefer to have a simple and what should be dignified measure stating clearly what it does instead of starting with avoidable ambiguities without explanation until clause 16. I think that the protest ought to be made even on this occasion, and I assure my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that I shall continue to make such protests if he employs the same draftsmen for future Bills.

7.59 pm

Mr. Eggar: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to the points that were made in the debate.

The Government are delighted that the Bill has received widespread support throughout the House and I am sure that that shows the close relationship that exists between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Australia.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) drew attention to that close relationship and in that respect he particularly mentioned the conversations that have been taking place about the Royal Commission set up by Australia to look into nuclear tests. As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, there were some helpful discussions between Senator Gareth Evans, the Australian Minister who is responsible for the matter, and my right hon. and hon. Friends, at the end of last month. He probably also knows that the United Kingdom has accepted the Australian invitation to participate in a technical assessment group. We have also agreed to be represented on a consultative group, which will examine the issues raised by the Royal Commission.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) also supported the Bill. I am sure that the Australians will be thrilled to have his imprimatur of their artistic endeavours. I am not so convinced that they will welcome his preoccupation with racing, wine and prisons, which is not exactly the image that they would wish to project of their country. However, I know that everything he said was said in a positive spirit.

[Mr. Eggar]

The hon. Member for Swansea, East suggested that we might have to have Alan Border back. I think that, in fairness to the Australians and the present poor state of their cricket, we might let them keep him.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East drew attention to the honours system and the way in which the Bill will change it. I confirm his impression. To complement the new legislation, it has been agreed by all concerned, including Her Majesty the Queen, that in future all honours recommendations will be made direct to the Queen by state Premiers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) rightly welcomed the Bill, and correctly referred to the anachronistic elements. The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) drew attention to the differences between the Canada Bill and the Australia Bill. I well remember the role that he played in the Canada Bill. He mentioned that nothing had been said about the Bill to hon. Members by aborigines in Australia. That is correct. We understand that no representations were made by aborigines to any of the state legislatures or the Commonwealth of Australia legislature during the passage of the Bill.

I refer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop). The whole House is always impressed by his grasp of detail and by the way in which he regularly draws attention to the importance of the drafting of parliamentary Bills. I should like to consider the points that he made, but as Opposition Members said, there is a reference in the long title of the Bill and in the preamble to the Commonwealth of Australia. The Bill is taken directly from the wording adopted by the Commonwealth of Australia Parliament. It is an exact replica of that Bill. Therefore, any amendment that we sought to make to the Bill in the House would have to be returned to the Parliament of the Commonwealth, and probably to the state legislatures as well. I am sure that we would wish to avoid that if at all possible.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Has my hon. Friend really been advised that to use the phrase "Commonwealth of Australia" in our legislation to make explicit what is internally explicit in Australia would have to be returned to Australia, when there is no change in meaning whatever? He knows the answer as well as I do. If my hon. Friend is trying to persuade the House of Commons of that, does he honestly believe it himself? The Bill is not like the Canada Bill. Its substance was affirmed by a foregoing Canadian enactment. This Bill will be an individual Act of the United Kingdom Parliament. Does my hon. Friend believe what he is saying?

Mr. Eggar: I hope that my hon. Friend will not do me an injustice. Of course I believe what I am saying. I said that I would consider carefully the point that he made. He was courteous enough to tell me earlier that he was likely to make it. I had to point out to my hon. Friend that there was a complication. I did not make any assertion as to whether his point would apply, when I said that any change that we made in the House would have to be referred to the Parliament in Canberra. I wanted to register that point. I was not using it as a definitive argument, nor would my hon. Friends expect me to do that because the Committee stage is still to come.

As all hon. Members have said, the Bill is widely welcomed in all parts of the House, as it was in all state legislatures and throughout Australia. The severance of the residual constitutional link that the Bill represents in no way weakens the deep practical bonds between our two countries. Those bonds are based on mutual friendship, and need no legal backing. The Bill acknowledges that. I believe that all hon. Members will wish to recognise that fact, and will be pleased to assist in the removal of the anachronistic links.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Durant.]*

Committee tomorrow.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A committal for tomorrow means that any amendments will be starred amendments. Can you give us any guidance as to whether Mr. Speaker will be unwilling to accept amendments tomorrow, because they have not had the day's notice that is usual before Committees?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for a long time, and he knows that "Tomorrow" does not automatically mean that the Committee stage will be taken tomorrow. In fact, we have been told that the Committee stage will be next Monday.

Museum of London Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

8.7 pm

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I feel that I should at this stage explain why the proposed new clause 2, which was in my name, was withdrawn last week, and what I propose to do about it.

In Committee I undertook to consider further the need for the production of regular reports by the board of governors on the activities of the museum to be required by law. That was in response to an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan). I accept the need for that additional overall statutory obligation. However, I have been advised that the new clause was hybrid and could have introduced additional and lengthy delays. I have a clear sense of obligation to the Committee. I therefore undertake that the Government will table a new clause in Committee in another place which, broadly described, will put a statutory obligation on the Secretary of State to lay regular reports before both Houses on the exercise of the board's functions. I hope that that explanation will be helpful to the House.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): We understand what the Minister has said, and we are glad that he took our proposal on board. We look forward with interest to the new clause that is to be tabled. The Minister is fortunate because if he had tabled a potentially hybrid new clause in front of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) we might have been here for a long time.

I should like to raise a concomitant point of order, on new clause 1. It was debated in Committee for about an hour. We were just beginning to consider the ramifications of the problem when I decided, with the approval of the Committee, that it would be more appropriate to debate such a major matter of principle on the Floor of the House. Therefore I did not put it to the vote, despite pressure from many of my hon. Friends. I thought that it would be better for the House as a whole to have a look at what has become a major matter of principle. We have learned today, from the tapes, that the number of attendances at the Victoria and Albert museum since the introduction of charging has dropped by almost half. We warned the museum at the time that that would happen. For this reason I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will reconsider the decision about selection. It is a matter of urgent importance. The unions are keen to have an answer. No answers were given, since the questions were never put to the Committee. For these reasons, I ask that we should be allowed to discuss the new clause.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I assure the House, and the hon. Member, that Mr. Speaker had all these considerations before him. He has made the selection, and we shall proceed accordingly.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The selection of amendments for discussion is something of a mystery, but may I ask you whether or not new clause 1 is in order? May I take it that if it were not in order it would not be on the amendment paper?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: New clause 1 has not been selected. Mr. Speaker had before him all the considerations which the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) very properly raised. New clause 3—Mr. Norman Buchan.

New Clause 3

DUTY OF GOVERNORS TO RETAIN OBJECTS IN COLLECTIONS

'The Board of Governors of the Museum of London shall not dispose of any of the objects in their collections.'.—*[Mr. Buchan.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Buchan: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

In the short time available it has not been possible to deploy all the arguments. However, they can be dealt with when the Bill goes to another place. I have no doubt that that will happen. I look forward with immense confidence to the Bill returning to this place after it has been passed by the House of Lords with new clause 1 added to it.

New clause 3 is a probing amendment. However, it goes further than that. We are anxious about the pressure that can be brought to bear upon the trustees and governors of museums. That is why this amendment has been tabled. We want an assurance from the Government that no objects in the Museum of London will be flogged off without the utmost consideration and care and without reference back to the Minister concerned.

8.15 pm

The Minister will appoint half the governors and trustees of the museum. A rampant and crude commercialism is the ideology and philosophy of this Government. They are cutting grants and support for the museums and thereby compelling boards of governors to behave in this way. Furthermore, because of the nature of certain appointments, action is taken that is in line with crude commercialism, instigated by the philosophy of the Prime Minister and this Government.

I have been very disturbed by what happened at the National Museum of Wales. There has been a great deal of correspondence about it, including a report in *The Guardian*. The keeper of the National Museum of Wales accepted an offer from a body called Brains Trust Incorporated to transfer to Japan one of the finest and best collections of impressionist paintings outside any capital city in Europe. It is an even better collection than the Glasgow collection, which is one of the most important of the provincial collections. Brains Trust Incorporated offered £250,000—although later evidence suggests that it offered £140,000—for the whole collection. It meant that the people of Wales would be deprived of the collection for a year while it was sent on exhibition to Japan. It would not have formed part of an educational tour, involving the British Council. The collection was to be shown inside a department store. It was a further extension of commercialism—the use of impressionist paintings to attract customers into a department store.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the exhibition was to be situated not only in a department store but in a distant corner of the top floor of that department store so that people would have to walk all over the store before they came to the art treasures?

Mr. Buchan: I understand that that was so. It is like one of those puzzles where one has to work oneself through to the end until one comes to the French impressionists, courtesy of Brains Trust Incorporated.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves his point about the Japanese department store, is he aware that Japanese department stores play a lively part in the patronage of the arts, particularly the patronage of living artists?

Mr. Buchan: That is quite true. When they can afford to pay this kind of money they have good reasons for doing so. However, without let or hindrance this collection of extremely valuable paintings went to Japan without the benefit of proper curatorial care. We do not want that to happen to the Museum of London's collections. We want to ensure that if it is the wish of the governors to lend any part of the museum's collections it should be done on a reciprocal basis. That has always been the case with art collections. We want the Minister to assure us that what has happened in Wales and elsewhere will not be allowed to happen to the collections in the Museum of London.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) believes, it seems, that museums should never dispose of any of the objects in their collections. He has referred to his apprehension about the Government's rampant commercialism. I am apprehensive about the rampant reaction of the hon. Member for Paisley, South. He is the Bourbon of the world of the arts and the heritage.

To call somebody a Bourbon in the context of the arts and the heritage is not to disparage him, as hon. Members will recognise, but my anxiety about the hon. Gentleman is that he believes that nothing should ever change.

He reminds me of Charles X of France. The point of comparison is not that, as a young man, that monarch led a life of scandalous dissipation, although that is true, but that to a very high degree he believed in tradition. That was exemplified by the proceedings at his coronation service at Rheims which ran for very many hours. It was part of the antique ritual of that ceremony that the monarch should be pricked by a golden bodkin. It is easy to imagine or to fantasise that if the day comes when the hon. Member for Paisley, South finds that he is Minister for the Arts a similar grandiose and very beautiful ceremony will be performed. Charles X prostrated himself for 12 hours during the ceremony. One can imagine the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) as his acolyte administering the puncture with the golden bodkin. One could also fantasise about the hon. Gentleman attempting to press the bodkin home a little deep. But, be that as it may, if I were to pursue that line of thought no doubt you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

However, I want to advance a serious objection to what is being proposed by the Labour party. It is the mark of all good collectors, whether private or museums, that they seek to improve the quality of their collection. It would be a mistake in the case of an important museum such as the Museum of London, which has a serious responsibility to preserve and archive material of great importance relating to the history of London, to rule that neither the directors nor the trustees should ever have the power to dispose of objects that were of trivial or minor importance and not worthy to be in the collection. We should be prepared to advance and to be a little more open-minded in that respect.

There must, of course, be safeguards. It is important to provide that a future director should not be able to succumb to the caprices of collecting fashions and dispose of objects at his sole discretion which might, by a wider judgment and the judgment of posterity, be objects of genuine importance that should be in the collection. But one can provide against that by requiring that the trustees should have a right of ultimate decision or by some such procedure. But it would be a mistake not to provide that there should be power to dispose of objects of second-rate importance.

Mr. Freud: In that case, will the hon Gentleman accept that it would be helpful if the governors came from three different stables rather than two?

Mr. Howarth: I do not think that that is essential to the point of principle that I am trying to establish. For example, in America it is a much more widely accepted practice that museums should be free to dispose of minor objects. That is one reason—among many others—why the quality of collections in many American museums and galleries has been enhanced over the years. I do not want to debar that possibility from the Museum of London.

Finally, it is curious that Opposition Members, who are rightly anxious that more funding should be available to our museums and galleries, should want to preclude one minor, but none the less not insignificant, source of possible additional funding.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) told us in his concluding sentence all that we wanted to know in defence of the new clause. One would expect an hon. Member representing the constituency that the hon. Gentleman does to introduce into his speech so many literary and historial references. I can assure him that the people of Newham, North-West have still not finished talking about the coronation ceremony of Charles X.

The hon. Gentleman's last sentence lies behind this new clause. He said that there is this one way of raising money — renting out exhibits to other countries. I am completely in favour, as are all my hon. Friends, of the interchange of exhibits between museums internationally. One would want to see that happen. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) referred to the National Museum of Wales, and we have the feeling that that museum did what it did at precisely that time in order to raise funds because there was a great shortage within its budget. Therefore, its reason was not the high-flown one that we would support. Instead, it was done on a straightforward commercial consideration.

The Opposition have said consistently in Committee and on other occasions that we can see the time coming when the Government, in attempting to cut public expenditure as they have attempted to do unsuccessfully for years, will look to the soft underbelly of the arts, the museums and library services in order to try to make some token savings, forcing those arts institutions into the market place in a way that is conducive neither to the interests of the museums nor to the interests of the consumer—the public who pay through their rates and taxes for the museums and art galleries to be maintained.

Just as we saw the National Museum of Wales accepting a pretty measly amount of money for the cream of its exhibits for a year, we can see in the figures that have been released tonight from the Victoria and Albert that it has been forced into introducing a scheme for voluntary admission charges, not because, as one understands from the director of the Victoria and Albert, they want to do it as a matter of principle, but because they have been forced to do it through not having sufficient funds for the museum's activities.

The Minister might say that we are being somewhat alarmist, but it is our duty to look to the future. After all, the future is with us, not with the Conservative party. We are worried that in the short time before a Labour Government are restored and my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South is gracing the Government Front Bench as the new Minister for the Arts, perhaps museums will start selling off some of their exhibits in order to raise cash because the Government have squeezed them.

Those are the reasons for the new clause, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I must speak on this new clause because it is rubbish. It is greater rubbish than any new clause or amendment that was tabled in Committee. Not only is it nonsense, but it does not even mean what Labour Members intend it to mean. It says that the museum shall not dispose of any of the objects in its collection. Surely, if a person rents out an item he retains ownership of that item, while losing possession temporarily. Therefore, the clause would not debar anybody from renting out property.

Secondly, I wonder just how sterile it is to fetter directors of the new Museum of London right from the start in not being able to dispose of certain objects on display. Not all the objects are ancient artefacts. Some are models which the museum might want to sell to schools for educational purposes or to other museums to demonstrate the history of London.

Thirdly, I wonder whether the new clause is consistent with the Labour party's policy on museums. If the British Museum were to transfer the Elgin marbles to the Museum of London, the Museum of London would not be able to sell the Elgin marbles. If this new clause were to apply to the British Museum, the Elgin marbles could not be returned, which I believe is the Labour party's policy. For those three reasons the new clause is nonsense and I beg the House to reject it.

Mr. Spearing: A few weeks ago I too might have thought that the new clause was otiose or went too far by way of safeguard. But I do not feel that today after having sat in Committee and knowing a little of the extent to which the Government and their representatives and nominees are going in respect of Britain's assets.

The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) spoke of the Elgin marbles. They are not Britain's assets; they are the assets of Greece. We know that there has been some discussion about their future. Almost by definition

"any of the objects in their collection"—

presumably, at the time that Royal Assent is obtained—relates specifically to London. That is the difference between this museum and the British Museum or the National Museum of Wales.

Therefore, by definition, if anything at all is to be sold it will be sold to either a London organisation for storage or display inside London—the Inner London education authority has been mentioned—or it will be sold outside London altogether. That, almost by definition, would be undesirable, or at least there would have to be a strong case for so doing in terms of sale rather than by loan or overseas exhibit.

Unfortunately, the members of the governing body who would take such decisions will be nominees of the Prime Minister of the day. I do not know how long the present Prime Minister will stay in her position—there have been a number of varying estimates in the past day or two—or who her successor might be, or whether there will be a Tory successor. The other governors will be nominees of the City of London. We have been over this in Committee but I say again that such a board of governors would not enjoy the same confidence of a Labour Government as would the existing board of governors.

8.30 pm

A few weeks ago, one might have said that any reasonable person would not be irresponsible in selling off artefacts or exhibition material from London, for example from some useful and interesting exhibit of the 1930s. The London museum has a 1930s shop—a Boots or a Woolworth—which is well laid out.

The Government are selling off all sorts of national assets. Who would have believed even two years ago that a Government would tell the House that they were expecting to dispose of Land Rover? If the Government can do that, their nominees can act irresponsibly towards the objects that have been collected to represent London.

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), at an early stage, asked us to use our imaginations to the full, and he discussed issues such as the coronation of Charles X. Tempted though I am, I shall not be drawn into this exciting debate. In the second part of his speech my hon. Friend made the important point, which was backed by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), that we should not fetter the museum. We should not allow the total immobility in the movement of objects of art between museums that the clause would bring about. It says:

"The Board of Governors of the Museum of London shall not dispose of any of the objects in their collections."

Therefore, it is extremely restrictive. It would be wrong and impracticable for an institution such as the Museum of London to have such a clause imposed upon it.

The existing Museum of London Act 1965 has in section 5 a thoughtful and carefully drafted provision, which gives adequate safeguards and provides a sensible flexibility to the board of governors. The 1965 Act allows the board to dispose of objects, but only if the object is a duplicate or if it is not, in the opinion of the board, required for retention in the collection. It goes on to say that at least two thirds of the members of the board of governors must approve of any disposal before it takes place. It makes other safeguards for objects vested in the board under particular trust conditions.

We can count on the board to maintain and enhance the museum's collection, to present a picture of London's history that is as complete and representative as possible. That is one of its main aims, but the 1965 Act rightly allows for a little manoeuvre to dispose of duplicates and certain other objects as well. The present law should stand.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) suggested, at least by implication, that the

[Mr. Luce]

Government were likely to starve museums of funds. It has now been confirmed that the City Corporation will match our contribution of £2·25 million to the museum, and therefore there will now be a 10 per cent. increase in the budget for the coming financial year. There could not be a better sign of our commitment to the museum. There is no question but that we shall continue basic funding. There is that assurance.

The law has worked perfectly well under the 1965 Act, which has been in operation for 10 years. With the criteria about the disposal of objects of art, it has worked successfully. I see no reason why we should change the present rules. It would be wrong to impose immobility on the movements of objects of art, which is what the new clause proposes. It is better to have the existing safeguard under the board of governors, which is in an appropriate position to make sensible judgments. I ask the House to reject the new clause.

Mr. Buchan: I must express my intense disappointment at the extraordinary way in which the probing amendment has been received. I had thought that the Minister would immediately accept the principle that inspired the amendment and would have agreed to the House of Lords bringing in a more appropriately worded amendment. However, we are dealing with a Government that are very different from that who brought in the 1965 Act. Proper qualifications were written into the 1965 Act, but they are not qualifications with which I would trust this Government. Nor are the nominees that they will appoint necessarily the ones I would agree to.

A Labour Government brought in the 1965 Act. It says that there can be no transfer of objects unless it is approved by

"not less than two-thirds of the governors for the time being."

That was at a time when the board was made up of three separately appointed thirds, but now it is a board entirely composed of Government nominees and, of all "uncommercial" bodies, the City of London. I would not trust my bodkin to such a body. There are good reasons why we put this to the "à l'outrance", as they probably said at the time of Charles X, because we cannot trust this lot.

There is another reason for the clause. We are not saying that it is necessarily a bad thing for museums to interchange or to loan. There may even be an occasion when such a provision might extend to other sections, for example when there are duplicate copies of instruments. However, we want such movement to be rare, qualified and taken care of by a properly democratic board of governors, not one appointed by this Government.

A final reason for the new clause is that we shall be in power in two years. We are willing to have an absolute regulation, not for all time to come, but a stop placed on the actions of this Government and their board during the following two years. Given the disappointing answer, we can no longer treat this as a probing amendment but as a correct and firm amendment and a moderate assessment of the position that we are facing.

Mr. Tony Banks: Put it to the vote.

Mr. Buchan: I would do so, but I do not wish to summon up the armies of support behind this new clause. The Bill will go to another place, as Joan of Arc had to do at Rheims, so that she could deal with her acupunctured monarch. We shall leave it to the good sense of the House of Lords. Therefore, despite pleas to the contrary, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Tony Banks: Take no prisoners.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Is it your pleasure that the new clause be withdrawn?

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn, Hatfield): No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that his vote must follow his voice.

Mr. Murphy: Very well.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

Composition of Board of Governors

Mr. Tony Banks: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 7, after second 'by', insert

'the Corporation of the City of London under paragraph *(b)* of subsection (2) of section 1 of the Museum of London Act 1965 and'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 10 leave out from second 'date' to end of line 14 and insert

'that number of members shall be appointed by the Greater London Arts Association'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 11, leave out from 'subsection' to end of line 14 and insert

'shall be increased from six to eighteen'.

No. 4, in page 1, line 15, leave out subsection (2).

Mr. Banks: Amendments Nos. 1, 3 and 4 are consequential upon each other. Their purpose is to eliminate the Corporation of the City of London from that part of the Bill which allows nomination to the museum's board of governors. The continuity of the museum's board will be broken on 1 April 1986 when, with the abolition of the GLC, that council's nominees will not longer be able to serve on the board.

In Committee the Opposition were consistent in opposing extensions of nominating rights to the City of London. On reflection, we now wish to remove the City of London entirely from the right to nominate to the board. The Bill is before the House only because of the abolition of the GLC. We would not be considering changing the board's composition were it not for the disgraceful abolition of the GLC — something on which I have spoken many times in the House and on which I shall continue to speak until citywide government in London is restored. I agree that we shall have to await the next Labour Government, but I can be patient for about two years.

In the meantime, we should bounce this matter straight back at the Government. We must say to them, "You have caused the mess in London because of an act of political vindictiveness by the Prime Minister, who personally wrote into the 1983 Tory party election manifesto the abolition of the GLC and then added the metropolitan county councils for good measure." The Government are only now realising the mess that will be left in London and elsewhere because of abolition. The Bill represents only a small part; it is not the messiest part of abolition. The provision of sewerage and waste disposal services will be a far messier consequence of GLC abolition than altering

the composition of the board of the Museum of London, but they stem from the same irresponsible, undemocratic act—the authoritarian approach of the Prime Minister, who said that, because she did not like the people who controlled the GLC, she would abolish it.

That might sound an unlikely thing for the Prime Minister to say, but I refer hon. Members to the speech made by the chairman of the Tory party—the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) — who, in his inimitably gallant and moderate way, said that because the new divisive Labour party controlled county hall, the Government would abolish the GLC. He is the only Conservative to have spoken the truth publicly about the abolition of the GLC. It was an act of political vindictiveness inspired by the Prime Minister, and this Bill is a consequence of it.

I want the Government to pick up the entire tab for the Museum of London and to give all the rights of nomination to the Prime Minister, because she caused the problem. Another reason for my wishing to do so—this is much more pleasant from the Opposition's point of view—is that the City of London has no long-term future. The next Labour Government will have to consider the structure of London local government——

Mr. Hanley: Why?

Mr. Banks: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. I am certain that, when the Labour Government do so, the City of London will not avoid the fate that it has dodged since the 19th century. At that time, the City of London had an opportunity to expand its limits to those of the natural London at the time, but it declined because it wished to retain its ancient rights and privileges.

I remind the House that the Herbert Commission, which reported in 1960, said that if logic had anything to do with it, it would recommend the amalgamation of the City of Westminister and the City of London; but logic had its limits and, for its purposes, the City of London lay outside them. What an amazing statement: the City of London can defy logic. It might have been able to do so until now, but it cannot defy the democratic wishes of the incoming Labour Government, and I look to that Government to do something about the City and the democratic structure of London.

8.45 pm

My amendments anticipate that event. We do not wish to have to introduce a Museum of London Bill in 1989 and again change the structure of the board of governors. The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) asked why we wished to abolish the Corporation of the City of London. I refer him to the structure of the City, with 13,000 electors controlling the wealthiest part of London. The City retains the business vote, although it was abolished in the rest of Britain some years ago. It retains aldermen, who were abolished throughout local government elsewhere. What is more, those aldermen are elected for life. Can one imagine the uproar if I came to the House and said that GLC members should be elected for life? There is a good bunch of GLC members over there, and they deserve to hold office for life—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Not all of them; occasionally one has to take prisoners on board, and one cannot always pick and choose the people with whom one travels. We should have met great opposition had we introduced such an undemocratic proposal. That is what happens in the City, and that is why we do not want the City to have nominating rights to the board of governors. Central Government should accept the entire burden.

The Museum of London is not the museum of the City of London. Another reason for our objection to the corporation's power of nomination being enhanced was our fear that a museum designed for all of London would become more limited in its scope and vision because one of its major paymasters was the City of London. A concentration on the square mile would not be in the interests of Greater London as a whole, nor in the interests of the museum generally—*[Interruption.]* I realise that interesting meetings are occurring in the Chamber; clearly my hon. Friends are already completely convinced of the argument and need not listen to my speech. However, from the attentive faces of Conservative Members, I know that the power of my rhetoric is swaying them. They understand the basis of my argument. They realise that right is on our side in this argument, as in all others, and in that confidence I urge the amendments on the House.

Mr. Luce: I have heard the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) speak many times, but that was one of his more extraordinary speeches.

Amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 4 would end the appointment of governors, not only by the GLC, but by the City of London, and would allow them to be appointed by the Greater London Arts Association. Amendment No. 3 suggests that those nominees should be replaced by a further 12 governors to be appointed by the Prime Minister. That is the most curious amendment, because in Committee and on the Floor of the House during the past half hour we have heard several attacks on the suggestion that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should be responsible for appointments to museums, yet the amendment suggests that she should have the power to appoint not just nine governors, but all 18 governors. I am delighted and interested in that suggestion. I think, however, that the Opposition ought to make up their mind on what they want my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to do——

Mr. Banks: The right hon. Lady can do anything that she wants to do.

Mr. Luce: —about the appointment of governors.

I am delighted that the Opposition have such trust in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is excellent news that they believe my right hon. Friend would make a good range of appointments to the board. It is marvellous news that the Opposition have now changed their mind after all the discussions in the debate. At least we have managed to convert the Opposition to the wisdom of the Government's approach and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's sensible appointments to the board of governors.

I must rightly and firmly stick to the fundamental point that I have made throughout. It would not be sensible to divorce the appointment of governors from the funding arrangements—that is to say, 50 per cent. from the Government and 50 per cent. from the City of London. It would be sensible and consistent to stick to that approach.

Mr. Tony Banks: The corollary of what the Minister said earlier is that he should now accept the amendments. If he does not do so, it will prove that he has no faith in the Prime Minister's ability to make the right appointments.

Mr. Luce: Unlike the hon. Gentleman, who seems to be totally inconsistent so far in his contributions, I am trying to be consistent. The Government are giving 50 per cent. of the funding, and the Corporation of the City of London is giving the other 50 per cent. It makes absolute sense that each should have nine nominees out of the 18, and we should persist with that broad approach. If the City is contributing 50 per cent., it is certainly not unreasonable that it should have that role in the appointment of the governors.

I must reiterate that I have always taken seriously the important points about the Londonwide nature of the museum. That concept is built into the Bill in clause 2, which was debated to a considerable extent in Committee. I repeat what was said in Committee and during the earlier stages of the Bill, that in making these appointments to the board of governors my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the City of London Corporation will take full account of the Londonwide nature of the museum.

I wholly and utterly reject the attack made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on the City and his claims that the City is unsuitable as a body to make these nominations. I must tell the House that the corporation has a long and distinguished tradition of serving Greater London and the surrounding area. We should remind ourselves that the City Corporation established the Guildhall museum, which was a forerunner of the Museum of London. The corporation has played a major part in the creation of the Museum of London. I ask the House to reject the amendments.

Mr. Buchan: The Opposition cannot get reason through to the Government. The whole point is that since this mess was created by the Government and the Prime Minister, the sensible thing is to let them get on with it for a couple of years, not involve the City of London with all the problems: leave it to the Government.

The Opposition have made every attempt to secure some democratic representative content in the governing body. We do not regard appointment by the Prime Minister and the Government as particularly democratic, and it is certainly not representative. We do not regard the City of London as democratic or representative. For that reason we tried different methods, successive bodies, a combination of the boroughs, the question of ILEA and so on. It seemed to us that at least the Greater London Arts Association has concern for the arts—and there is no guarantee that the Prime Minister or City of London nominees would have that—and that was one final, modest attempt to get the matter resolved.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend recall that the City Corporation and the City fathers, for centuries no doubt, have received great benefit from the existence of the Sadler's Wells theatre? The Prime Minister and some of her colleagues seem to have reneged on that understanding. Perhaps there is more sense in this than the Minister might think.

Mr. Buchan: My hon. Friend is trying to make a comparison and seeking to find someone who is better than the present Government.

Mr. Tony Banks: Anyone is better than the present Government.

Mr. Buchan: I was about to say that. That is an easy comparison, and is one that I accept.

Who would have thought that after 300 years of theatrical history a nationally and internationally renowned body may now have to close its doors because of the stupid malevolence of the Government in abolishing the GLC? That particularly foolish act has affected Sadler's Wells and the Arts Council which will have difficulties as it has been completely under-funded. I hope that the Minister will take back to the Prime Minister the point that is being made in our concern about the Museum of London. We are concerned about the wider arts.

Mr. Hanley: In his closing remarks, will the hon. Gentleman say why he has been so dissatisfied with the appointments of the City of London corporation, and with which of the current members of the board he is dissatisfied? I believe that the directors who have been appointed so far, have carried out their tasks admirably in the interests of all the citizens of this country and especially of Londoners. Will he explain why he wants to remove the power which has been so wisely exercised by the City of London Corporation?

Mr. Buchan: The hon. Gentleman must do me no wrong on that point. I have never, at any point, attacked any member so far appointed by the City of London. The Opposition have criticised the City of London and disputed the suggestion that it is the appropriate body to make such appointments. Above all, we have disputed the suggestion that its power in relation to the board should be increased. We have no doubts about that but I made no criticism of present members, despite the actions of the Government.

The only advice I would give to whatever directors are appointed, is that they should not write any solicitors' letters and, above all, they should not go near the Solicitor-General while this Government are in power.

We have made every attempt to get a proper solution to the representation on this body and no doubt we shall return to it later.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Opposition have been consistent throughout about the City of London. There has been no criticism of any governors, either those appointed by the City of London or by the Greater London council. I still hope that when the Minister announces the names of the new governors, he will bear in mind the service and contribution of a number of the GLC nominees, who have been drawn from across the parties, to the success of the Museum of London.

This is a matter of principle. The Opposition have opposed the extension of powers for the City in terms of nominating rights because we do not believe that, in local government terms, the City of London is the correct and democratic institution to have such powers.

I have many personal friends within the City of London. In my term of office as chairman of the Greater London council, which still has some weeks yet to run, I have had many courteous exchanges with past and present Lord Mayors of London, and very charming and pleasant people they are. But I stress that this is a matter of principle not a personal matter. The reason behind the Opposition amendments about the City is that we want to minimise the disruption to the composition of the governing body by the City of London. It is the full, firm and stated intention of the Labour party when it is returned to power in a couple of years time, to deal with the City of London. There will

not be abolition in the crude sense; rather I trust it will be through the incorporation of the City of London into the surrounding boroughs.

County hall may well have been sold as a hotel or supermarket or for some other obscene purpose promoted by the London Residuary Body supported by the Government. We might have to transfer the government of London to the Guildhall and the Mansion house. I look forward to a new Lord Mayor of London who will represent all Londoners and not just the 13,000 residents within the square mile.

9 pm

When that day comes and I, as the last chairman of the GLC, greet the new Lord Mayor in the Mansion house, I shall be able to say, "We tried in 1986 to stop further disruption of the Museum of London governing bodies, but it looks as though we failed." That is one of the consequences of the incorporation of the City of London. We are merely trying to anticipate what will happen in two years' time. Clearly, the Minister does not want to take the opportunity to look into the future.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Buchan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No one said no.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I heard the Minister say no.

Mr. Buchan: I am glad that your hearing is better than ours, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Clause 2

Functions of Board of Governors

Mr. Luce: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 2, line 39, at end insert

'publish information concerning such investigations and research'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 7, 8, 13 and 14.

Mr. Luce: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you suggested that we should sensibly take these amendments as a group because each one flows from the other.

The purpose of amendment No. 6 is to make it clear that the Museum of London or any other body or person in conjunction with whom it may be working in connection with the provision of archaeological services in London may publish information deriving from archaeological investigations and research.

I gave undertakings in Committee to consider an amendment along those lines. The amendment follows the spirit of the amendment tabled by Opposition Members. However, the wording of their amendment was not sufficiently clear and did not sit easily with the Bill's existing wording. There are three points. The first is that we have detached publications from the non-specific powers to provide and promote archaeological services. Secondly, we have linked the power to publish to the result of the specific investigation and research being carried out under the terms of the Bill. Thirdly, the wording follows the pattern of similar provisions in existing legislation.

As I explained to the Committee, I did not believe that the amendment was strictly necessary, but there are precedents in the London Government Act 1963 and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. I must be fair to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) who said in Committee:

"excavation is not completed until it is published".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 21 January 1986, c. 101.]

I agree with that. I should not wish there to be any doubt about the powers to publish information under the Bill. For that reason, I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Buchan: It would be ungracious of me not to thank the Minister. He promised to table an amendment after our open and broad discussion in Committee. I thank him for bringing it forward so expeditiously.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 2, line 41, leave out 'and'.

No. 8, in page 42, after 'research', insert 'and the publishing of such information'.—*[Mr. Luce.]*

Mr. Spearing: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 3, leave out lines 1 to 6.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 10, in page 3, line 3, after 'State', insert

'and he shall not give such consent unless he has satisfied himself that the acquisition or disposal will facilitate the exercise of their functions by the Board of Governors and that the acquisition or disposal is in the best interests of Greater London generally'.

No. 11, in page 3, line 5, leave out 'and the Corporation'.

Mr. Spearing: The amendment excludes part of the compound, complex clause 2 which does a number of things. The amendment would delete clause 2(4) which provides:

"(4) The Board shall not acquire or dispose of any land or any estate or interest in land without the consent of the Secretary of State and the Corporation and such consent may be given subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State and the Corporation consider appropriate."

We are all aware that the increased number of members of the governing board will be nominated entirely by the Prime Minister and the City corporation. The powers of those bodies, by virtue of their powers of nomination, will be increased indirectly. The indirect power of elected persons — members of the GLC — are not just being decreased, they are being extinguished. That in itself would give additional powers to the Government, and the corporation, but an additional power is being written into the Bill which we did not discuss a great deal in Committee. The sanction of the Secretary of State and of the City of London Corporation will be required, to acquire or dispose of land or property.

What is more significant is that either of those or both can place limitations on the discretion of the governors in pursuit of that activity. The Minister may tell us that such and such an Act has been passed in relation to other museums or, indeed, national monuments where these powers are inserted. Be that as it may, the Minister has to make out a specific, proper case for increasing the powers of both these authorities. We know that it is not necessarily to be used in a way related entirely to acquisition and disposal.

I imagine that people, when given power, like to use it. I can imagine that the Secretary of State, the Minister, or those who advise him at the third or fourth level, or some people in a committee of the City of London corporation, when asked: "May we buy this land, this warehouse, or that historic house in the City or

[Mr. Spearing]

elsewhere?" will say "Yes, you may do so as long as . . ." The "as long as" may set out the conditions which may require that the board of governors should perhaps make a charge or dispose of what are regarded as surplus assets —both are matters which we have already discussed. It may require the Board to do something which it may not be inclined to do otherwise.

These powers do not look great, but could be exercised in a way which would provide less scope for the governors. It behoves the Secretary of State or the Minister to tell us why. The Minister should tell us what he has in mind and the type of condition which may be imposed in these circumstances. Unless he does I do not think we can decide our views on the matter, although in principle, we think the clause should not go through. The case was not made in Committee.

Amendment number 11 relates to the corporation's powers in this respect. Let us suppose that the Secretary of State says, "All right, half the money is coming from me and I can make those conditions." Is there any reason why the corporation should as well? The Minister will no doubt reply, "Ah, but the corporation is providing part of the money, so it should have these powers as well."

That is arithmetically true, but as has been made abundantly clear in this debate, the City of London Corporation is acting for the whole of Greater London in that it is the only London body specifically involved in nominations. It is providing money in an unrepresentative way. The Minister, when he replies, will have to justify his having the powers. But he must make out a specific case for the corporation having them too. Even if there are precedents in other legislations, I would think that these additional powers are unnecessary because the additional members of the board of governors are appointed by the corporation and the Secretary of State.

Mr. Hanley: I believe that the clause as it stands, unamended, is wholly desirable. As we discussed in Committee, the Museum of London is tantamount to being a charity. It is treated as a charity in all legal respects. It is common in charitable law that a restriction is imposed on the distribution, sale or any other disposal of assets especially of land. The doctrine of cy pres should apply. That is that the property should go to the next nearest object of similar worth. I can see that there is a difficulty and that it might be thought desirable for property to go to some other body, but it is only sensible that those who have paid for the organisation should have ultimate control over the disposition of any property that is sold. I doubt whether the Secretary of State or the corporation will be in conflict with the board that they have so carefully appointed.

The clause is wholly sensible and ensures that assets are disposed of only with the agreement of the Secretary of State and the corporation. I see nothing wrong in it.

Mr. Buchan: Will the Minister consider accepting amendment No. 10, which provides a small extension? I shall not repeat our arguments on this subject. We have expressed our doubt about the Conservative party and those it will appoint to look after the museum. The Bill is restrictive and amendment No. 10 would facilitate the exercise of the Board's functions by providing that acquisition

"will facilitate the exercise of their functions by the Board of Governors and that the acquisition or disposal is in the best interests of Greater London generally".

We have been worried by the narrowness of view that has been expressed generally and which appears to have been taken towards the museum. We are anxious to ensure that Greater London and the region round about is taken care of. I therefore ask the Minister to consider accepting amendment No. 10, if only for the greater comfort of the leigis.

Mr. Luce: I can give a strong assurance that the interests of Greater London will be taken into account.

Amendment No. 9 would delete section 3(4) of the Museum of London Act 1965, as proposed in clause 2. That subsection empowers the board of governors to acquire or dispose of land, subject to the consent of the two funding authorities—the Government and the City. The provision which the amendment would delete brings the Museum of London in line with the National Heritage Act 1983, which applies more specifically to the Science Museum and to the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is essential that I, on behalf of taxpayers, who will find half of the museum's costs, should be able to have a say in the expansion of the museum's estate. The plans to acquire or dispose of land are already subject to scrutiny by the funding authorities in considering the museum's annual budget. It is right to include that more formally in the Bill. That is also important from the point of view of accountability.

Amendment No. 11 would require the consent of the Secretary of State to the acquisition and disposal of land and property, but not that of the City of London corporation. I must reject that, too, for the reasons that I have already given. It is wholly appropriate for the City, as one of the two funding authorities, to have a say in changes in the museum's estate. As I said, it will already do that when considering the museum's annual budget. It is right to include this more formally in the Bill as well.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) implied that, if we will not accept amendments Nos. 9 and 11, the Opposition would like to impose conditions on whichever Minister is responsible before he is able to consent to the acquisition or disposal of land by the board of governors. That runs counter to the amendment moved by the hon. Gentleman, but I appreciate that the main purpose of the amendment was a probing one. I readily accept that the conditions mentioned in amendment No. 10 are among those on which I and my successors would wish to be satisfied. However, they would be among several factors to be taken into account in the overall responsibility.

9.15 pm

We get into more difficulty if we try to imagine every set of circumstances in which the board of governors would have to take account of the acquisition and disposal of land. It is more sensible to remain consistent with the National Heritage Act 1983, with which the Bill is in total line and which allows for accountability on the part of the Government and the City. With that in mind, I ask the House to reject the amendments.

Mr. Buchan: I am unsure of the position. Do I need the leave of the House to discuss an amendment in the middle of a discussion on other amendments?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member can deal with the amendments that I have called—No. 9, with Nos. 10 and 11.

Mr. Buchan: My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) will wish to put his own view on amendments Nos. 9 and 11. In the middle of this general discussion, I wish to comment on amendment No. 10, to which my name is attached.

It is all very well referring to the National Heritage Act 1983, but clause 2 substitutes section 3 of the Museum of London Act, which gives general powers. When this matter was discussed in Committee, we argued that the remainder of clause 2, because it detailed a number of functions, but not all the possible functions, left open to question whether those functions not mentioned could be ignored. The Minister will remember the argument. We argued that we would prefer general powers to the listing of some powers.

In relation to the listing of some powers, the Minister said that he accepts the qualification as being among several qualifications, but not all. However, he turns our argument back on us and says that he cannot accept the qualification because it could throw in doubt the other purposes with which subsection (4) might deal. He cannot accept proposals regarding subsections (1), (2) and (3), and prevent additional qualifications and purports from being written into subsection (4). The purpose of amendment No. 10 is that it should in the best interests of Greater London generally. To be consistent with the line the Minister has taken of listing several objectives rather than the general powers in clause 3 of the parent Act of 1965, he has compelled us to adopt his philosophy and structure of clause 2 and extend it into subsection (4).

To be consistent with changing a simple eight line general powers section into a long and extended section by including functions, I ask the Minister, for our comfort, to add in subsection (4) that it must be done in the best interests of Greater London. Otherwise, he will be faced with the problem that he tried to argue about in Committee. His argument was that the proposal sets out the objectives and purposes. Everyone is entitled to believe that the fact that the amendment is missing suggests that it need not have been included. We are asking that it is included and we hope that the Minister will reconsider it.

Mr. Spearing: I am not sure of the procedure, Mr. Speaker. Amendments Nos. 9, 10 and 11 are being taken together because they are on the same point. Amendments Nos. 9 and 11 seek to remove the additional powers that the Bill gave to the Secretary of State and the Corporation of the City of London respectively in imposing conditions on the governors of the Museum of London. Amendment No. 10, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) has just referred, is not consistent with the provisions of amendments Nos. 9 and 11. In a sense, my hon. Friend's amendment says that if the Minister cannot accept my measures to delete these powers, we should at least insert a safeguard.

I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker. If I withdraw amendments Nos. 9 and 11, will it be possible to put the Question on amendment No. 10? Although I do not like the increased powers given to the Secretary of State and the Corporation of the City of London, especially in view of the increased representation that they already have, and although I am not entirely persuaded by the arguments on the Science museum, the Victoria and Albert museum and the National Heritage Act 1983, there is some logic in them. Therefore, I do not seek to press amendments Nos. 9 and 11. I hope my colleagues agree that there is some sense in what my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South said about safeguards and that we are able to express a view, even if it is negative, on amendment No. 10.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member is asking whether I would allow a separate Question to be put on amendment No. 10, the answer is yes. Does the hon. Member wish to move amendment No. 9?

Mr. Spearing: I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 9.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 10 in page 3, line 3, after 'State', insert

'and he shall not give such consent unless he has satisfied himself that the acquisition or disposal will facilitate the exercise of their functions by the Board of Governors and that the acquisition or disposal is in the best interests of Greater London generally'. —*[Mr. Buchan.]*

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Spearing: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 3, leave out lines 14 to 19.

As I said in Committee, clause 2 has many parts. The amendment will delete new section 8(2), which states:

"The Board may allow any premises occupied or managed by them to be used by other persons (for payment or otherwise) for purposes not connected with the Board's functions under this Act if the Board are satisfied that to do so would not conflict with those functions."

The aim of new section 8(2) is to widen the board's discretion in the use of the premises in the way outlined. Normally, one might say that that is a good thing and that it gives more scope and options to the board. However, because of the actions of the Government and, perhaps, of some of their nominees, I am unhappy with the breadth and scope of that measure. Clearly these activities, for which payment may or may not be made, are likely to be entirely outside the museum's purposes.

Those purposes are fairly wide in terms of cultural and other activities. Under this measure the board of governors may, as it were, turn its premises to commercial advantage. The Barbican and the City of London would be ideal premises for all sorts of social or business functions to take place. The Minister will say, "The board must be satisfied that this does not conflict with its functions." There could be much discussion by the board, because, of course, that is a matter of judgment.

If conditions are to be laid down on the sale of property, the Secretary of State may say, as he has said to many local authorities—if he can treat elected authorities in this way, he can treat the board of governors in the same way —"You may do that, but you had better make a bit of money for yourself. You have the power. Advertise and let the property for the price that the market will bear."

Despite the qualification that there must not be a conflict with the functions of the museum, such conflict is a matter of judgment. The commercialisation of the premises would be a real danger. I hope that the Minister will at least give an indication of the thinking of the Secretary of State, if not of the City of London Corporation.

Mr. Luce: The purpose of the amendment is to remove the part of the Act that gives the power to the board to

[Mr. Luce]

"allow any premises occupied or managed by them to be used by other persons (for payment or otherwise) for purposes not connected with the Board's functions under this Act if the Board are satisfied"—

I stress that—

"that to do so would not conflict with those functions."

That is important.

The provision stems from an equivalent provision in the National Heritage Act 1983, which has proved useful in practice. The idea is simple—it is to give the board of governors the option to allow the museum premises to be used for functions, events and so on which are outside the direct objectives of the museum as defined elsewhere in the Act.

The provision allows the board to raise money for the museum by charging for the hiring of its premises for occasional events. I do not see why I should not urge the House to agree that that objective should be encouraged.

In answer to the probing of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), I must stress that that power is not confined to the Museum of London, but is already allowed for with other museums such as the Science and the Victoria and Albert museums. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the activities must not conflict with the functions of the board.

It is wholly sensible that the board should have that small degree of latitude, if it so wishes, to allow the premises to be used, if they are not at that time being used for their normal purposes, to raise money for the museum through hirings. After all, such an option is at the discretion of the board of governors.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Surely that would be a useful and equitable means of raising income for the museum, and, provided that it is within the terms of the clause, it could be a great blessing.

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right. Experience since the 1983 Act has shown that such a provision can be useful. We should give that latitude to the board of governors, provided that it is in keeping with the objectives of the museum.

I ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Spearing: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker. I am afraid that the Minister's words confirmed my worst suspicions. In effect, he said, "Let the board make the best use of its assets, even if it is for purposes not connected with the purposes of the museum."

I accept that the Minister said that such purposes should not conflict with the museum's purposes, but if there must be a balance to compensate for the reduction in Exchequer contribution, there could be a possible conflict in the use of the premises. My public library, because of pressure from the Government, has become a disgrace because of the hours that it is not open. It is not used by anyone when it is closed. With any other Government in office I would not have pressed the amendment, but in view of the well-known predilections of both the City of London Corporation and the Prime Minister, if not of the Secretary of State, I feel that the Question should be put.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 4

FUNDING OF GREATER LONDON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE

Amendments made: No. 13, in page 4, line 5, after 'London', insert

'and publishing information concerning such investigations and research'.

No. 14, in page 4, line 7, after 'research', insert

'or the publishing of such information'.—*[Mr. Luce.]*

9.30 pm

Mr. Luce: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We have had about 15 or 16 hours of debate on Second Reading and in Committee and now the Bill is being debated once more on the Floor of the House. The House has shown the importance that it attaches to the Museum of London by the amount of time that it has been prepared to give to scrutinising the Bill. We may not have agreed on a number of issues but, whatever is said, we all wish to see the museum succeed.

We are seeking to make adequate arrangements for the museum's funding and for appointments to the board of governors after the abolition of the GLC on 1 April. I believe that the Bill succeeds in doing that. The Government's strong commitment to the museum is demonstrated by the fact that we have, jointly with the City Corporation, increased the museum's budget for the coming financial year by over 10 per cent.

We have had full debates about the museum's responsibilities towards archaeological services and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has made it plain that additional sums are being made available to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission so that it can undertake archaeological services in conjunction with the museum. Against that background, I express the view that the museum has a great future. That future has been reinforced by the Government's recently announced funding arrangements and by what I hope will be the passing of the Bill.

9.32 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): As the Minister has said, we have had about 15 or 16 hours of debate in considering the Bill. It is not one of the larger measures that the Government are to bring before the House this Session, but it is an interesting Bill. It has given the House and the Committee a chance to discuss various aspects of arts policy, and it is sad that the House seldom has an opportunity to explore and debate them. We have been able to discuss the problem of acquisition and the relationship between the arts and education. We have also discussed the more fundamental issues of accountability and general policy and attitude towards the arts. For that reason—that of lack of opportunity—the House has welcomed the chance to enter into these debates. It is sad, however, that the opportunity arises in considering an extremely ill-judged and ill-conceived Bill.

Our consideration of the Bill has provided us with the chance to hear the views of a newly appointed Minister, and we have had the opportunity to assess him. We welcome him in his new job and welcome specifically the fact that we have a Minister with responsibility for the arts

who is answerable in this House and with whom we can debate and discuss arts policy. That is something that we lacked for two years prior to his appointment. We also welcome the Minister's flexibility in listening to our arguments in Committee and amending the Bill tonight. However, despite those quiet and modest gestures of approval, it has been clear during the passage of the Bill that the Minister, for all his kind words and solicitations, is as hamstrung and straitjacketed on arts policy as his predecessor was by the Government's ideology and determination to subject the arts to pressures and rigours to which they are not suited, and in pursuance of which it does not best serve the British people—neither the audiences nor those who live and work in the arts.

Although the Bill is small it has been extremely important, both for the museum and the Government's general policy towards museums. It is undoubtedly a bad Bill, and wholly unnecessary. It flows from the Government's vindictiveness towards the Greater London council. Because the museum was but a small part of the GLC's functions and work, the Bill has received precious little thought from the Government. I am sure that when the Prime Minister took it into her head to attack the GLC, she little knew that one of its powers and functions was to oversee the heritage of our capital city — its archaeological, industrial, social and cultural archives and records which reside in this excellent museum. She did not know and certainly did not care about that. Therefore, when it dawned on her civil servants and Ministers that, as a consequence of her determinaton to abolish the GLC, the Government would have to deal with the museum's governorship, the Government had to cobble together this little Bill to amend the Museum of London Act 1965. As a result, this is an ill-considered Bill, and will do nothing to improve the governorship, management or future of the museum.

All hon. Members know that it is a museum of London. Therefore, logically, it should be controlled by democratically elected representatives of the people of London. All hon. Members are democrats and know that that follows from the inevitability of having a museum of London. The only sensible way to administer it is through democratically elected representatives, which is how at least part of the governorship of the museum has always been in the past. But the Bill is removing that one democratically elected representative part of the governorship which has a direct interest in and accountability to the people of London. In doing so, the Government do no favours to the museum or the people of London.

All hon. Members know that that is true, and that the management and administration of the museum to date has been extremely good. When the Minister replies I defy him to say how the Bill can possibly improve the quality of the museum, or of its accountability to the people of London. Because of the museum's good management, it may continue as well as before, but the Bill does not improve the quality of the museum. The Government have been meddling in the administration of the museum simply because of their vindictive attitude towards the GLC. That cannot be a good reason to alter the governorship, powers and functions of the museum. The Minister knows that that is the case. In Committee he could not give one way in which the Bill would improve the museum, and he knows that it will not do so. The Bill does not improve the museum one jot or tittle.

The greatest nonsense of all is that, because of the absurdity of having to introduce the Bill, the Government have found themselves turning their own policies on their heads. The Government are determined to cut expenditure in every area but because of this Bill they are increasing Government expenditure on the Museum of London.

The Minister has come before the House and the Committee saying how good and virtuous the Government are and how well intentioned they are in planning to spend £2·5 million a year on the museum in the future. That is an increase in the museum's overall budget of 10 per cent. The Opposition welcome that and thank the Minister for it. We hope that that increase will continue in subsequent years. However, the Minister has not told the House that that £2·5 million is a much greater sum than the Government contribution to the museum last year. Therefore, we have the absurdity of a Government committed to cutting Government expenditure having to increase Government expenditure on the museum because of their facile and stupid attitude towards the Greater London council. There cannot be any greater absurdity for the Minister for the Arts to find himself in.

For all the kind words, concern about standards and intelligent interest in the conditions of the museum and its future which the Minister expressed in Committee, the truth is that the Government's basic philosophy towards the arts, not only their political philosophy towards local government and democratic representations in London, is not consistent with a good, sane and improved administration of the arts.

The arts should not be solely for the market place. There is a national and public interest in the arts and in our culture which goes beyond that. That is something which the Government have missed and not understood in the Bill and because of that, the Bill brings no credit to the Government. I am sure that the Bill will be repealed by a future Labour Government when they return democratic government to London.

9.42 pm

Mr. Hanley: It would be wrong for the Bill to pass to the other place without a tribute being paid to those who work in this excellent museum. One of the great advantages of being selected for the Standing Committee was the opportunity, which many of us took, to visit the museum and see it with a fresh mind. It was a great privilege to be able to see behind the scenes. However many times many of us may have been to the museum, it had previously been impossible to see behind the scenes.

The museum is an iceberg. It may be a cliché to say one eighth above water and seven eighths below, but that is true of the museum, in that the artefacts on display are but a tiny proportion of the total amount of paintings, prints and relics which are lovingly restored and lovingly catalogued. They left a deep impression upon me. The way in which the people work behind the scenes with such great dedication is something of which the people of London and the country should be proud.

When I visited the museum there were only two matters pressed upon me by those who wished to discuss the impending Bill. Those matters were not political, but sensible alterations or clarifications to the Bill. The first was that we should have regard to the contribution of the London boroughs in appointing people to the board. That has been guaranteed by my right hon. Friend. It is not just

[Mr. Hanley]

a museum of the City of London. It is a museum of London, of all its people and the area around London. That has been clearly set out by my right hon. Friend.

Secondly, the people at the museum wanted to ensure that the archaeological side of the museum would be guaranteed. It has been, and is consistent with the other powers of the board of the museum. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for what he said in that regard.

There is a third matter which is one of my own. I had hoped that a report might be presented, at least once every three years, or more if circumstances determine, because of extra funding. I am glad that my right hon. Friend has said that that will be dealt with in another place. I am grateful for the extra funding which the Government are providing for the year to come.

The Museum of London shares in the honour that my right hon. Friend received. No doubt the idea of making my right hon. Friend a Privy Councillor was swayed by his appointment as Minister for the Arts. It is a tribute to the way in which Conservatives view the arts that he has been so elevated. Therefore, on the Bill passing to the other place, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts and the Government on their commitment to the historical arts of London.

9.45 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: That was a brown-nosed job of a speech, but it was made in that wonderful voice that the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) has, which no doubt will guarantee him future appearances on party political broadcasts for the Conservative party.

When I saw the Leader of the House come in, I thought that we would have the tumultuous news that the abolition of the GLC was just an ugly rumour, but I now realise that the right hon. Gentleman is probably more interested in the speech on the Adjournment, which is perhaps nearer to his heart than are the arts. That is on his own admission. He has said that he is probably the worst philistine in the House. It is a brave claim, even for the Leader of the House, given the company he keeps.

The Bill is one of the easier aspects of the abolition of the GLC. I correct the Minister. The GLC will be abolished at midnight on 31 March. It is the Government who take over on All Fools' day on 1 April, not the GLC. Although the Bill is one of the easier aspects of GLC abolition, in other areas of the arts in London the consequences are likely to be more fraught and dangerous. We have heard talk about Sadler's Wells. If the Minister for the Arts wants to show his total commitment to the arts, let him, even at this late stage, make an announcement when he speaks on Third Reading that the Government will step in with the necessary funds to save Sadler's Wells. That will be the way of guaranteeing that this otherwise largely unreported debate will get some coverage tomorrow morning. Let us see whether the right hon. Gentleman would like to reach out for that.

There are problems not only with Sadler's Wells but with the Half Moon, the Theatre Royal in my constituency, the Riverside, the Tricycle, the Warehouse, and all the many small theatres, particularly in community and ethnic arts. They will suffer because of the abolition of the GLC. The Greater London Arts Association has estimated that between 25 and 100 bodies are likely to go because of GLC abolition. No one can quantify the number. However, the Bill represents an easy part of abolition. The Minister will have many more pressing problems on his plate from 1 April. I do not think that he will have such an easy ride when he deals with those aspects of GLC abolition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said how strange it was that a Government who advocated the abolition of the GLC, at least on one ground, that of cost, now find that they have to dig deep into the public purse to pay for services and interests previously maintained efficiently and effectively by the GLC on behalf of Londoners. I suspect that, as with the problems for the arts, problems about the public expenditure consequences of GLC abolition will come back time and again to haunt the Government before their demise at the general election.

I shall always seek to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, to rub in the message on GLC abolition long after 31 March when it has been abolished. However, this evening we are dealing with a small aspect of the abolition of the GLC. I join the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes and my hon. Friends in wishing the Museum of London well in future. The future is no better now than it was when the GLC was partly responsible for the museum's affairs. I pay great tribute to the role of the GLC and to the support that it gave to the museum.

I give particular credit to the GLC nominees on the governing body of the museum. I remind the Minister once again that those nominees were not selected on the basis of the Prime Minister's dictum, "Is he one of us?" They were selected on a cross-party basis and included Tory as well as Labour nominees. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind when he appoints the governors after the Bill has received Royal Assent. I hope that he will also bear in mind the service rendered by the GLC nominees, both Conservative and Labour.

We shall have to return to this matter in a few years' time. After the election of a Labour Government, the restoration of citywide democracy and the abolition of the City of London, we shall have to look again at the functions of the Museum of London, and in particular at its board. We shall remember this evening. The Opposition wish the Bill well in another place. It is a necessary Bill, because of abolition, and we do not wish to oppose it.

9.50 pm

Mr. Murphy: I rise in support of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts. I, too, wish this measure to be enacted. During the Second Reading debate on the Museum of London Bill I referred to private sponsorship of the arts, which is relevant both to the heritage and to the Museum of London. It may be of interest to those hon. Members who were present on that occasion to know that, subsequent to the adoption of my report on this subject by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a favourable response has been received from the Committee of Ministers. It shares the view that

"the potential resources for cultural financing can be increased by combining state and private efforts."

In the opinion of the Committee of Ministers, such a combination has been made especially relevant as member states seek the most effective use of the resources that are available for culture and turn increasingly to forms of co-funding with other bodies. However, despite such

collective wisdom, which embraces Governments of differing political complexions, the Committee stage of the Museum of London Bill was——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I take it that this is a preamble to what the hon. Member intends to say about the Bill.

Mr. Murphy: You are, as ever, absolutely right, Mr. Speaker. Despite that recognition of the importance of co-funding, the Committee stage of the Bill was accompanied by a great deal of Socialist dogma and anti-capitalist rhetoric. The partnership between the Government and the Corporation of the City of London is exactly the type of partnership that should be encouraged in both the public and the private sectors.

During the passage of the Bill attempts have been made to denigrate the Government's commitment to the arts and to the heritage. The Socialists have again adopted the ploy of trying to turn myth into fact. That should be exposed for exactly what it is—misrepresentation.

Mr. Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Murphy: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. There was enough to-ing and fro-ing in Committee for us to know exactly where all hon. Members stand in their commitment to the arts and the heritage. I see no reason for the proceedings of the House to be held up once again. I believe that the Bill will assist the Museum of London. It will also assist the people of London and my constituents who live outside London. I wish the measure well.

9.54 pm

Mr. Buchan: I rise to make the last Opposition speech before the Bill goes to the House of Lords, where I suspect many amendments will be made to it.

This is not a happy occasion. Indeed, it is a very sad one. It is the first measure to have emerged after the introduction of the stupid, malevolent and ill-thought-out concept to abolish the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties. It has been done out of malevolence and pique, and without considering most of the consequences that will flow from abolition. Above all, it was done with no consideration of how properly to replace any democratic say in the various institutions of London. The Museum of London is only one aspect but it is a serious sign that the Government intend to maintain this undemocratic approach throughout the many other problems that will arise.

Several hon. Members have referred to the fact that we have had between 15 and 16 hours of discussion. One of the problems was the interminable intervention of Conservative Members, which limited the useful discussions of the Opposition. We accept that some hon. Members—even in Committee, difficult as it was to discern—may be interested and concerned in the arts. I go further. I believe that the new Minister, perhaps without any direct experience, is learning fast. I think that he learned during the course of the Committee. Attention has been drawn to the desire to bring in the London boroughs and to emphasise archaeological aspects. That largely stems from pressure that we brought to bear. While at the end of the day amendments were not required, there was a commitment that we welcomed.

We have been accused of making nothing but anti-capitalist statements. In fact we have brought a change of tone and attitude towards the Bill. We have even recognised Government amendments. To talk about anti-capitalist remarks reminds me of Karl Marx's comment that the bourgeoisie built statues to the great writers of the past but that if they had ever read their books they would have burned them. We congratulate the Minister on his first venture only because it is his first venture, not because of the nature of the Bill.

A number of issues still face us in relation to the arts in Londong. The narrowness of view in relation to the Museum of London has borne fruit in recent weeks. At the time of abolition, both of the metropolitan authorities and the GLC, we warned that among the areas of our life that would be in deadly trouble were the arts. Pledge after pledge made by the previous Minister and repeated by the present Minister, maintained that the arts were in no danger and that funding would be brought forward to replace the funding that would be lost from the metropolitan authorities and the GLC.

Of course, it was said that there would be cuts. Of the £20 million that was required, £4 million would come from the boroughs. That proved to be a complete misunderstanding—an under-estimate. In fact, even with the additional £10 million for the arts, there is still a £19 million shortfall. The Arts Council says it needs £10 million because it knows it will not get the £9 million from the Government.

We are seeing the consequences. The Government say that they are under-funding deliberately because the successor bodies will come forward to support the arts, yet the first thing that happens is that no successor body—no borough, no council—is represented in the first piece of legislation. That is some evidence of what can be done by the successor councils when they are treated with such contempt.

But the Government know and we know, and events have proved, that what we said was right. Local councils have had their rate support grants cut and have been rate-capped. Indeed, it is those who are most generous towards the arts who have been subjected to rate capping. They cannot replace the funding that came from the metropolitan authorities and the GLC. We hear the Minister saying that he is proud of the £2 million-plus that the Government and the City of London have added. Yet it is astonishing that the Government have been led into additional expenditure which they did not think about when they abolished the GLC. We must remember that the rest of the arts remain in trouble.

The Museum of London has been saved but the Government have, for example, plunged Sadler's Wells, with its 300 years of theatrical history, not only of national importance and fame but international importance and fame, into closure. It is unthinkable, but it will happen. We have seen the Cottisloe theatre close, and now Sadler's Wells will go. We know that in the north-east, the Empire in Sunderland, the royal theatre in Newcastle, and the royal philharmonic hall in Liverpool are also in bad trouble. This is linked to what the Bill will bring about. The two things are integrally linked because they stem from the same narrow, petty, mean-minded attitude of the Government. We are seeing the apotheosis of Mammom and a growth of Philistinism.

We hope that——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

[Mr. Buchan]

That, at this day's sitting, the Museum of London Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Buchan: We hope that the other place will improve the Bill.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I have been trying to catch his eye, but it is rather difficult when he speaks with his back to me. He spoke about the City of London. Many things have been said about its role and the additional money that it is making available to the Museum of London to match the Government's increased contribution. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the City of London, already the wealthiest borough in London, will make a considerable amount of money out of the abolition of the GLC. This is because a number of new schemes will be carried out on a per capita basis, and as the City has only a small population, it will benefit enormously in terms of a reduction in its contribution. Even the additional money that it is giving to the Museum of London is not an act of generosity but is paid out of profits that will accrue because of the abolition of the GLC.

Mr. Buchan: My comment about the apotheosis of Mammon was right.

The multitude of arts bodies that have been supported by the GLC, both small and professional, such as the ethnic and community arts and theatres such as the Half Moon and the royal theatre in Stratford are in London, but there are others beyond London.

We cannot take too much pleasure in the £4 million-plus going to the Museum of London. We are pleased that the Minister has secured that money, but we are displeased with the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the museum's governing body that he has inherited and will now establish. Will he take back the message to his mistress that the biggest single act that she could take, both to win our co-operation on the Bill and, more importantly, to save the arts in Britain, which are such a ferment of fear and anxiety, is to restore the money lost to the arts through the Government's ill-conceived schemes?

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

PROTECTION OF MILITARY REMAINS BILL

Ordered,

That the Proceedings of 31st January in Committee and on Third Reading of the Protection of Military Remains Bill be null and void.—*[Mr. Biffen.]*

Scotch Whisky Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

10.3 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity of this debate, particularly as events in the Scotch whisky industry are so topical. However, the debate is on the industry and not just the immediate developments in it.

The Scotch whisky industry has had a difficult few years. Volume sales have declined from a peak in 1979. The number of distilleries has reduced since then from about 130 to 100, and employment has fallen from over 25,000 to about 16,500. While smaller companies have performed fairly well, especially those selling single malt whiskies, the industry leader, Distillers, has generally not done well, and the facts show it.

The industry is obviously extremely important, to Scotland, but it is also important to the whole of the United Kingdom. It provides manufacturing jobs, many of them in areas where there is little or no alternative, and it still represents a major export industry, with sales approaching £1 billion a year. It is important to maintain and develop its employment and export potential.

The recent developments began in the middle of 1985, when Guinness took over Arthur Bell and Sons plc for £356 million and so acquired the top domestic brand of whisky. The Fosters lager consortium, Elders IXL, has put in a bid for Allied Lyons, which includes William Teachers, whose two distilleries are in my constituency. Teachers is the second largest United Kingdom brand. That bid has rightly been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, involving as it does the acquisition of a key product by an Australian group, which must be examined carefully in this strategic industry.

It is not surprising that bids and counterbids have been launched for a company such as Distillers, which seems to be under-achieving its potential under its present management. The first bid came from James Gulliver's Argyll Group, which offered £1·89 billion. When the bid arrived, there were calls for it to be referred to the MMC. On competition grounds that did not seem to be justified, but in relation to the strategic national interest the bid warranted at least deep consideration about whether it would secure jobs and promote exports.

Mr. Alexander Pollock (Moray): In that context, does the hon. Gentleman recall the words of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who said that in addition to competition there might be referrals

"where the destiny of a vital national capability is at issue?"

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning a factor that must be considered in all bids. I am anxious that the bids are treated equally and fairly and that similar considerations are applied in all cases. That is the critical factor.

Nevertheless, the Argyll bid was cleared. Then Guinness made a bid, which was agreed with Distillers —it invited Guinness in and offered to pay its expenses —for £2·19 billion. If that merger were to go ahead, it would create a group that accounted for 35 per cent. of the whisky market. There is a dispute as to how much whisky

production that group would represent, but it is between 35 and 50 per cent.—probably nearer to 35 per cent. The group would also own, as Distillers still does, 50 per cent. of United Glass, which accounts for half the sales of bottles to the whisky industry.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): When the hon. Gentleman produces statistics about the capability of the Distillers-Guinness conglomerate, will he take into account the spare capacity that is available to Distillers and not rely on a suggestion of actual output? Distillers has a considerable amount of capacity which is at present unused but which could come back on stream.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I intend to deal with the point later.

As Guinness has acquired Arthur Bell, it would, with Distillers, become a bigger group than Distillers alone and would be bigger than a Distillers group owned by Argyll. That presents a dilemma, because it is difficult to believe that a bid to create such an enlarged group should not be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, although the Government may take a different view. However, if that merger is referred, it would leave Argyll clear and free in the market and would handicap Guinness. Not to refer it would undermine the credibility of the Office of Fair Trading. Could it say, "We will not refer this bid because we did not refer the Argyll bid; but had there not been an Argyll bid, we might have referred it"? We must have a clear statement, whether or not the bid is referred, of the reasons for so doing. The Minister and the Government must take that point on board.

That clearly leaves the Government with limited options. If the Guinness bid is not referred to the commission there must be a clear explanation for that, as it is difficult to see why it should not be referred. If there is a good reason, it should be made available.

If, on the other hand, the bid is referred to the commission, the Ministers responsible have two further choices. They can either review the decision of Argyll on the ground that they need to consider all the implications for the industry and it would be fair to consider both bids at the same time, or they can state, as this would be the effect of their decision, that they are effectively endorsing the Argyll bid, at least by implication, and explain that they are happy for that to happen. How the bids are referred and judged should not be left to luck. Both bids have every right to be treated fairly. All the factors, jobs, exports, management potential, the merits of the bid and the implications of competition should be considered equally for both bids.

The sheer scale of these bids and the wide issues that they raise require a clear statement by the Government of their position. I do not think that we can accept a "hands off" approach, unless it is a genuine "hands off" approach. There should be no under-the-counter meddling over the decision to refer or not to refer. That would have a perceived effect, and that fact must be taken into account.

It is unfortunate for those of us who are caught in the middle of these battles that they frequently degenerate into an argument between the management of the two different companies. There are claims and counter-claims, which does not add to the clarity of information on both sides. The merits of both companies are such that there is no doubt that if either of them were to take over Distillers there would be a re-invigorated whisky industry, using the brands to lead a new attack on the export market. That would be desirable. It is important that the relative accounts of both companies are considered.

Argyll launched its bid with an attractive statement—attractive to me as a Scottish Member—which claims that the company will bring Scotch whisky back home. It would establish a new company in Scotland. Its management team would be based in Scotland and the industry would be run from there. Argyll claim that its management team has a marketing background which can revitalise the industry, and it feels that its actions are a logical development of its own business.

Guinness countered that by claiming that it had greater international marketing expertise which would be much healthier and better for the industry. It also claimed that it would establish headquarters in Scotland. We should be grateful that there now seems to be renewed enthusiasm for operating international businesses within Scotland. All Scottish hon. Members will be glad to see that it seems from that point of view that we cannot lose. We shall get an enlarged whisky management group in Scotland.

I should not at this stage take sides in the issue other than to ensure that a fair deal is secured. I accept that the Scotch whisky industry needs a boost and injection of new creative management. It needs aggressive and creative marketing. I am looking for, and I believe that the Minister should want, a commitment to centering employment and management in Scotland and to securing the quality of Scotch whisky as a product and to ensuring that it is backed with effective, creative marketing to beat off the challenge it has suffered from its competitors, namely white spirits, white wine, brandy and so forth.

Although it may be invidious to mention the two together, I think we can learn something from the way the producers of Armagnac and Cognac have established the imprimatur on their quality product in a way which Scotch whisky could benefit from if it is to establish itself as top of the heap.

One of the difficulties in relation to white spirit in competition with Scotch, which will lead me to make specific recommendations at the end of my speech, is that there is, of course, no ageing process, no skilful blending and no mystique. One can make gin today and sell it effectively next week. There is no difficulty involved in forward planning, no expense in stock holding, and no creative skills are required. Yet, in the long run, that is not in the best interests of Scotland or the United Kingdom. It would certainly not create jobs in rural Scotland and it does not have the export potential that whisky has, as gin can be made relatively easily almost anywhere. Pure, good quality Scotch whisky can only be made in the right circumstances, in the right place—in Scotland.

The Scotch whisky industry is vital to rural communities and towns in Scotland which have blending and bottling plants. Teachers has its only two distilleries in my constituency and employs 50 people in two relatively small communities. Distillers had a distillery in my constituency but closed it many years ago. I am pleased to say that Morrisons of Glasgow took it over and not only generated employment by producing malt whisky but produces tomatoes and house plants from the waste heat. The company has generated some imaginative tourism on the back of those products.

The importance of the industry to rural areas can be explained by the example of a minister whom I met. He told me that he went for a charge in a rural parish and was

[Mr. Bruce]

asked, "Do you take a dram, minister?" Normally, a minister would assume that the correct answer was no. On this occasion he would have been wrong because the parish was entirely dependent for its employment on a malt whisky distillery. Fortunately, the minister gave not merely the right answer but the honest answer. He admitted that he took a dram and finished up with the charge.

After considering the points that I have made about the two bids the Government should make their position clear. That is critical. They should ensure that they take account of the interests of Scotland and the United Kingdom market. They should treat the bids fairly and even-handedly and explain their position clearly.

There are three further things that the Government should do for the Scotch whisky industry. I should like to address those points to the Minister. The Government should recognise their responsibility to work with the industry to ensure a good quality product. As the Minister will recognise, a definition of Scotch whisky is required by law. The ageing process is required by law. There are one or two further areas where legislation could strengthen and develop the Scotch whisky industry.

The first point is controversial. The Government should legislate to ban the export of bulk malt whisky. I accept that some distilleries would have some difficulties as a result, but I believe that it would protect the quality of our market. We export bulk malt whisky to Japan where it is blended with the local inferior product so as to pass it off as a more acceptable product. The result is that it is harder for Scotch whisky to penetrate the Japanese market. We face the possibility of the Japanese launching a major export assault on third markets using as a base bulk malt Scotch whisky. That is nothing like as advantageous as us selling Scotch whisky to those markets. In the long term such legislation would be in the best interests of the quality of the product and the market.

The Government should insist that the legal definition of Scotch whisky should provide that it should be full strength, at least three years old, distilled, matured, blended and bottled in Scotland and contain a statement of the percentage of malt whisky included.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): No.

Mr. Bruce: I understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety and I appreciate that it is an important constituency point. Such a quality product would enable the whisky industry generally to be extended to everyone's benefit.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Bruce: I must press on, because the Minister needs time to reply.

I know that the Minister will have to consult her colleagues on these points, but these are important issues. The Government should re-introduce stock relief to the Scotch whisky industry. The abolition of stock relief was effectively a tax on the quality of Scotch whisky. Scotch must be matured for three years. The cost of that three-year maturing process is estimated to be £53 million in lost stock relief. That £53 million would be much better deployed within the industry expanding the market. The re-introduction of stock relief would be to the Government's advantage.

I do not believe that the position of the Scotch whisky industry was appreciated when stock relief was abolished. It put Scotch whisky at a disadvantage compared to competitive products when it was facing a major assault from those products.

I urge the Minister to explain to her colleagues that Scotland feels that it should have a thriving and developing Scotch whisky industry, and they should recognise that bids of the scale that we are now witnessing fall, effectively to be the Government's responsibility. They should ensure that all the strategic considerations are taken into account, that the bids are treated fairly and equally and that Scotland obtains the best possible Scotch whisky industry, with local management, control and ownership and growing export sales. That is what we want, I hope that the Minister will be able to give answers which show that the Government are prepared to take on board their responsibilities and ensure that that is what we get.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Peggy Fenner): One of the delights of my job in the Ministry has been the opportunity to visit some of those fine Scottish distilleries, so I welcome this opportunity for a debate on the Scotch whisky industry. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has paid tribute to the industry as well as challenged it, and I wholeheartedly endorse what he has said. The Government fully recognise the importance of this industry as an important source of employment—some 16,500 jobs, many of them in disadvantaged areas—and as one of the United Kingdom's top five net export earners, the value of exports last year having topped the £1 billion mark. At home, the industry is very important, making a similar level of contribution to the revenue. There can, therefore, be no question but that the Government fully recognise the important role of this industry in the country's economy.

I recognise, however, that the hon. Member, in seeking this debate, is concerned at current trends in the industry and especially the effect of several recent major bids. As the House well understands, responsibility for monopolies and mergers policy does not rest with my Department. The Ministry, however, has responsibilities for the Scotch whisky industry and that is why I am pleased to reply to this short debate. As regards competition policy, as my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in a statement in this House on 5 July 1984, references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission would be made primarily on competition grounds. "Primarily" does not of course exclude other considerations. For example, the major consideration behind the recent decision to refer the bid for Allied-Lyons plc by Elders IXL Ltd., was the method of financing, which was thought to raise issues deserving of further consideration. On the other hand, the decision not to refer the Guinness bid for Bell's and Argyll's bid for Distillers was guided primarily by considerations of competition.

I know that there has been comment on these decisions. Reference decisions, whichever way they go, often arouse controversy. I do not want to stray too far into the responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I should point out that there were significant differences between the financing of the Elders and the Argyll bids which led my right hon. friend to his different decisions on the need for a reference.

The hon. Member has also raised the question of a possible referral of the recent Guinness bid for Distillers. This decision of course rests with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He will take that decision on the basis of advice submitted by the Director General of Fair Trading. It would not be appropriate for me to anticipate that decision or to comment on the matter at this stage.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Surely Guinness should have the same chance to bid to the shareholders as Argyll?

Mrs. Fenner: I have made the point that this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will be aware of the question of balance that has been put by my hon. Friend.

As the hon. Member for Gordon will be aware, my hon. and learned Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for corporate and consumer affairs, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), has announced that a review of the Government's competition policy will begin this year. The precise scope of the review has not yet been finalised but will be announced in due course. In the meantime I am sure that the interesting points made in this debate by the hon. Member will be considered in the review.

The hon. Member has mentioned several problems which are worrying the industry. As he is aware, the distilling sector working group of the National Economic and Development Office, which includes representatives of the industry, Government and the trade unions, has carried out a wide-ranging review which was published as recently as October 1984. This followed an earlier review in 1978. Matters have been examined carefully in a short time. The report identified all the major issues of current concern to the industry, several of which the hon. Member has mentioned, and made recommendations for action by Government and the industry during the next five years. We are still very much involved in implementing these recommendations and, of course, we are ready to play our part with the industry in tackling any new issues that may arise.

The possibility of the Government restricting bulk exports, particularly of malt whisky, has been suggested because of the benefits that would bring to the UK in employment and in other respects. I should point out that this issue was examined in the 1978 report, which concluded that the industry was insufficiently united voluntarily to regulate its bulk exports, while Government were restrained from such action by their international commitments under the GATT and by Community obligations. The 1984 study reached similar conclusions. Nonetheless, its analysis suggests that such exports have tended to stabilise around the 1978 levels, and figures just released in respect of last year's exports show a substantial fall in this trade. I am sure that that will reassure the hon. Member.

As for the abolition of stock relief in the 1984 corporation tax changes, the Government are well aware that because of its large stocks of maturing whisky, the Scotch whisky industry has been particularly affected by these measures, although in the longer term, as corporation tax rate falls, the industry should pay slightly less tax even without stock relief than it did before the 1984 changes.

In his decisions on taxation at the last Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer recognised the difficulties faced by the industry. I cannot of course anticipate the decisions that he will take in this year's Budget, but I am aware that the Scotch Whisky Association has made detailed representations.

The Government are working closely with the industry in several areas in which there is agreement that progress can be made. For example, the Government are currently considering proposals for whisky definitions to be prescribed in new regulations under the Food Act 1984. Any proposals will be subject to the usual consultation with all the interests concerned. We are also giving strong support to Community proposals laying down clear definitions of the spirit drinks most commonly traded within the Community. The industry is keen for the enactment of measures which should help the competitive position of Scotch whisky in export markets. We shall aim to press ahead with these proposals during our Presidency of the Community in the second half of this year.

We maintain regular and close contacts with the industry on the trade barriers it faces throughout the world and we pay special consideration to its efforts in the far east. The Government also have the interests of the industry very much in mind in their approach to the EC Commission's proposals on the harmonisation of the structure of duties on alcoholic drinks. Our joint aim is to help establish fairer terms of competition for the industry throughout the Community.

I know that the Scotch whisky industry has been through a difficult period during the past six years. World recession, coupled with changes in drinking fashions, has contributed to a drop in sales in many key markets. I would not, however, like to conclude on such a pessimistic note, which would not, I think, reflect current attitudes in the industry. In the past year or so, the industry has made substantial efforts to bring maturing stocks more into line with sales expectations. There is also some evidence now that the decline in world sales may be taking a turn for the better. In the domestic market, there was a 6 per cent. rise in consumption in the first nine months of 1985 as compared with the same period in 1984, with considerably greater growth in the as yet small malt whisky market. These are encouraging indications which we hope foreshadow a sustained improvement in the industry's performance to the benefit of the whole economy.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Will my hon. Friend bring home to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor the strength of feeling in the debate and the number of hon. Members who attended it? We want a revitalised Scotch whisky industry. The only way in which there can be a dramatic improvement in the near future is through budgetary measures. I hope that my hon. Friend will bring that point home to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mrs. Fenner: My hon. Friend puts his point very clearly.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (CITY EXTENSION) BILL
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Deaf-Blind Children

1. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the education of deaf-blind children; and what has been his response.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): Representations have been received only from the National Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association, which is now called SENSE. A meeting is being arranged with SENSE at official level to discuss educational provision for deaf-blind children.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Minister aware that children who are deaf and blind suffer from a unique disability which is different from either deafness or blindness, yet his Department makes no provision for them, providing teachers only for deafness or blindness? There is no mention of the deaf-blind in the Education Act 1944. Is he further aware that the devastating consequence of that omission is that more than half our deaf-blind children live in a complete vacuum with no contact with humanity? Is it possible for him to do something about training teachers for deaf-blind children?

Mr. Dunn: As the right hon. Gentleman said, at present there are no training courses specifically for teachers of deaf-blind children, although the future training needs of such teachers are currently under consideration. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I await with a great deal of interest the outcome of the meeting to be held on 14 February with officials of the Department and representatives of SENSE.

Mr. Freud: Is there not a good case for reviewing the procedure whereby deaf people with communication ability may qualify as teachers? Will the Minister tell the House what progress has been made in replacing circular 11/78?

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question. I shall write to him and let him have my views in due course.

Mr. Greenway: Bearing in mind the enormous cost of educating deaf-blind children, and the wonderful effort made by the SENSE family centre for deaf-blind children in my constituency, where the Princess of Wales has helped enormously to raise funds for the centre, will my hon. Friend tell the House what financial commitment his Department is making to this especially important area of children's education?

Mr. Dunn: As my hon. Friend will know, appropriate arrangements for the education of deaf-blind children are a matter for the local education authority in the first instance. However, I undertake to bear his point in mind.

Mr. Alfred Morris: My right hon. Friend's questions are about the urgent claims of some of the most severely disabled children in this country. What are the Minister's reasons for having refused to institute a special training course for teachers of those children? Is he aware that our only qualified teachers of the deaf-blind were trained in the United States and Holland? Finally, is it not wholly shameful that because there is no appropriate education for them, many deaf-blind children are consigned to mental-handicap hospitals?

Mr. Dunn: I acknowledge the force of the right hon. Gentleman's question. As I pointed out, the future training needs of those who will teach the deaf-blind are at present under consideration.

Adult Education

2. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will consider a further expansion of adult education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. George Walden): Plans for central Government expenditure on adult education for the next three years and local authority expenditure in 1986-87 are contained in the recent public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702). The Government will continue to encourage local education authorities and other providers to achieve the most cost-effective deployment of the resources available to them, taking account of both traditional and newly emerging needs. The Government's own expenditure plans on adult education are kept under constant review.

Mr. Haynes: That is a shocking reply. When will the Minister wake up to the fact that his Government have put millions on the dole and that he is missing a first-class opportunity to give further education to many who need it? He should resign.

Mr. Walden: The hon. Gentleman is being uncharacteristically unkind about Government policy. I remind him that the Government have introduced REPLAN, which the hon. Gentleman did not mention, which deals specifically with the educational needs of the unemployed. At the other end of the scale, the Government have also set up an effective mechanism—PICKUP—which deals with making sure that people will have jobs in the future, because they will have continuing training.

Mr. Madel: Will my hon. Friend confirm that he is looking for more help from the further education colleges and polytechnics to provide imaginative retraining schemes in the new technologies for adult unemployed and that the Government are funding them?

Mr. Walden: I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the response that we have had from higher education in general, and that the polytechnics in particular, in the matter of retraining and continuing training.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister accept that his answer will be seen as entirely complacent at a time when the Open University could provide tens of thousands of cheap retraining facilities for the unemployed and for those who want to upgrade their skills, but is stopped from doing so only by the Government's parsimony? Is he aware that he is stopping the individual development of many people, not only through the collapse of many of the programmes at the Open University, but through the complete collapse of the Workers Educational Association?

Mr. Walden: There is a whole panoply of misconceptions in that question. On the matter of the Open University, the hon. Gentleman might like to know that we have not only added money to bridge the funding gap, but have specifically converted a loan to a grant to help the university's admirable development of continuing education. The hon. Gentleman will know that we are in continuing consultation with the Workers Educational Association. We are continuing to discuss the level of the grant and the ways in which it can spend it more effectively.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Does the Minister accept that it is wholly unacceptable that the Government should be reducing the funding to the traditional residential education colleges, which in the present crisis of mass unemployment should be able to take up far more places?

Mr. Walden: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman phrased his question in that way. We are concerned to ensure that those residential colleges, the work of which we do not underestimate, make the maximum use of their premises, which, of course, includes expanding the numbers who can attend such colleges.

Student Loans

3. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give further consideration to the introduction of a system of student loans.

Mr. Walden: No, Sir. The possibility of replacing maintenance grants wholly or partly with loans has been ruled out at the present time by the Government.

Mr. Howarth: Will my hon Friend consider the fact that since the Government announcement of a 2 per cent. increase in grant and the withdrawal of certain welfare arrangements, we are in altered circumstances? Does he agree that it is becoming a matter of growing urgency to find some additional means for significant numbers of students, and that growing numbers of practically minded people see nothing unreasonable about doing as many other countries do and introducing a loans element into our system of student support? Will he undertake to revise the review of student finance, which the Government put into abeyance last summer?

Mr. Walden: I note the consistency of my hon. Friend's devotion to the cause of loans. However, the Government have weighed the pros and cons of loans, and, at present, the cons are seen as outweighing the pros.

Mr. Fatchett: Is not the strongest argument against loans—particularly at a time when access to university places is becoming even more restricted—that they will reduce opportunities even further for young people from working-class homes? If the Government went down the road of loans, would it not be a further indictment of their policy in higher education, and further evidence that they do not want working-class children to go to universities?

Mr. Walden: I cannot except the hon. Gentleman's premise, but I note his view that there might be a danger, if loans were introduced at any stage, to the children from more modest backgrounds.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend accept that his reply is somewhat disappointing to many of my hon. Friends? Will he review the matter, as there are serious anomalies in the present system, particularly where parents—I am one — do not top up their children's expenses at university?

Mr. Walden: I would be the last to deny that anomalies exist within the present system.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is it not ironic that the Minister has been criticised by his Back Benchers for not introducing loans, when he is quickly moving in that direction through the unofficial loans that are increasingly becoming part of student life? Is it not contempt of the House that the Government promised last year a full review of students' grants, but when they discovered that that review would reveal the real poverty facing students they abandoned it? Should they not now reintroduce that review and abandon the proposals in the social security review to take rights away from students until we have had a proper review of the state grant system?

Mr. Walden: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman finds room for irony in this situation. De facto loans, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, are private transactions between banks and customers, and it is up to students and their families to make sure before they enter into such commitments that they can be fulfilled.

Mrs. McCurley: Is it not most important that students should spend all their time in higher education studying, to the benefit of Britain, and not having to sell beets, as they do on campus in the United States, to earn their way through college?

Mr. Walden: My hon. Friend raises a good point. Obviously one of the advantages of the present British system is that it enables students to spend a good deal of their time studying. However, we live in the harsh real world and the search for outside employment does not have to overtake wholly the student's prime function, which is to study.

Student Grants

4. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current full rate of student grant; what was the comparable figure in 1979; and if he will express the current figure in 1979 prices.

Mr. Walden: The full rate of grant in 1985-86 for a student living away from home outside London is £1,830. This is equivalent to £973 at 1978-79 prices. The corresponding full rate of grant in 1978-79 was £1,100, but students at that time could also claim excess travel expenses, which were worth, on average, an extra £38 per student.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister confirm that the paltry 2 per cent. increase in student grants is a reduction in real terms, bringing the total reduction in real terms since 1979 to 20 per cent.? Does he accept that this will be exacerbated by the change in social security provision which will make the student ineligible? What is the rationale behind making students suffer in this way, particularly students from working-class backgrounds?

Mr. Walden: I do not deny that the Government's measures are calling for an extra effort from students and parents. At the same time, I would expect the hon. Gentleman and those students——

Mr. Foulkes: What is the reason?

Mr. Walden: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, I shall tell him. I expect the hon. Gentleman and those students and parents to understand that this effort is being asked for against the background of an unprecedented expansion in the numbers of students in higher education.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not students on full grants who are suffering, but those whose parents are assessed but fail to pay? They are the ones who are obliged to take out what he is pleased to call de facto loans, which most people call overdrafts. This is a serious matter on which we wish the Department would change its mind.

Mr. Walden: My hon. Friend draws attention to a real problem. However, I am sure that she would not want or expect the Government to regulate relationships between parents and children. As previous Governments have said, we hope that parents will pay their student offspring the required contributions to their grant.

Mr. Madden: If the Government introduce their poll tax, how will it affect student grants, and what changes in grants will be implemented?

Mr. Walden: The Government have not yet decided whether or how students could be compensated if the introduction of such a tax were confirmed.

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend agree that people of 18 are adults and not children? If he does, will he please reconsider loans? If he is to penalise students, as he is doing, there must be some alternative, and a properly regulated low-interest loan would appeal to some.

Mr. Walden: As I said in reply to an earlier question, the Government cannot deny that there are some anomalies in the present system. One is the long-standing convention that it will unfortunately be far too costly—a matter of hundreds of millions of pounds, I believe—to lower the independence age from 25.

Mr. Wilson: In the light of the exasperation expressed by the Minister's Back Benchers, will he care to explain the educational reasons for grants declining in value by 20 per cent. in real terms during the past six years? Does he agree that that decline tends to discourage the take-up of higher education? It certainly causes hardship, whatever the educational implications might be.

Mr. Walden: I rather doubt whether the hon. Gentleman has considered the educational implications. As I have already said, we have the largest ever number of students in Britain, and we have the largest proportion of the population in higher education.

European Youth Ministers (Meeting)

5. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on Britain's role and position at the European Youth Ministers meeting.

Mr. Dunn: As a member state of the Council of Europe, the United Kingdom was among those invited by the French Government to participate in the conference of European Ministers of Youth held in Strasbourg last December to mark International Youth Year.

Mr. Lawler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. As participation was the central theme of that conference, will my hon. Friend outline what the Government intend to do to encourage participation by young people nationally and locally once the youth circular replies are all in? What will the Government do to advise local authorities on how they can encourage meaningful participation by young people locally in all bodies, ranging from tenants' associations to district-wide youth councils?

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. He will know that the need for young people to participate in youth service consultative bodies locally and nationally was stressed in circular 1/85. The appointment of three young people to the National Advisory Council for the Youth Service is an example of the Government's commitment. We are receiving responses to our circular from local authorities, and steps are being taken to ensure that we have a full response. Further statements will be made in due course.

Mr. Fletcher: Do we have a Youth Minister? If so, why? Is it really my hon. Friend?

Mr. Dunn: We have a Youth Minister, and it is a very good thing.

Mr. Sheerman: I am delighted to hear that there is a Youth Minister. We are not quite sure who it is. Will the Minister go back to his European colleagues, who have well-established youth interests, and tell them that the British need to take a new initiative because International Youth Year left British youth worse off, worse employed, and worse trained than youth in any other western European nation? When will he learn something from the Europeans and then come back here and implement it?

Mr. Dunn: Some 41 recommendations were agreed at the conference. The difficulty with having a Minister solely responsible for youth is that a number of Departments of State and agencies of state have a youth interest. Therefore, to have a designated Youth Minister in the sense that the hon. Gentleman would like might appear to be only a gimmick. As for future developments, the hon. Gentleman will simply have to wait and see.

Teachers (Dispute)

6. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' current pay dispute.

7. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

10. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

16. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest position in the teachers' dispute.

18. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest position on the teachers' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): As I said in my statement yesterday, I welcome the provisional agreement reached at ACAS which holds out the promise of a settlement of the 1985 dispute, a return to normal working in the schools and constructive negotiations on pay, pay structure, duties and conditions of service.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend join me in hoping that the unions which have already agreed with the ACAS deal will ratify it with their members? Does my right hon. Friend remember that the National Union of Teachers for many years, while it had the controlling majority on the teachers' panel on the Burnham committee, forced its views on the other unions so that they had to accept them whether they like it or not? Will my right hon. Friend join me in urging the NUT to accept the majority deal, about which the other unions are happy, whether it likes it or not, now that the boot is on the other foot? That would be democratic.

Sir Keith Joseph: I remind the House that the employers as well as the unions concerned have undertaken to consider ratifying the proposal. I, and I expect all hon. Members, hope that the NUT will call off disruption and co-operate in the negotiations.

Mr. Evans: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, under the terms of the so-called provisional agreement, many thousands of teachers will receive an offer of less cash than they could have had last October? Does the right hon. Gentleman seriously expect intelligent male and female members of the NUT to accept such a ridiculous proposition? Why will he not recognise that the only way to bring peace and tranquillity to the education system is to produce much more Government finance?

Sir Keith Joseph: I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the fact that it was the NUT's actions that led the unions to reject, after a mere 20 minutes, the offer to which he now rather yearningly refers.

Mr. Dormand: In view of the possible settlement of the teachers' pay dispute, will the right hon. Gentleman say how much additional money is available for the 1986-87 settlement? How much importance does the right hon. Gentleman attach to the fact that the NUT—the biggest teachers' union—is undertaking its 14th ballot of members and that the previous 13 ballots have strongly supported all the actions taken by the union?

Sir Keith Joseph: The first annual instalment of the £1·25 billion over four years, less the amount of money reserved for midday supervision, would be available during 1986-87 to be added to rate support grant if the agreement were made in sufficient time for that to be practicable and were a bargain within the terms laid down by the Government to be struck. We all very much hope that will happen. I recognise the way in which the NUT has proceeded with ballots, but I still believe, first, that it is wrong for the teachers to disrupt the education of children, and, secondly, that, despite constant information available to the teachers, not all the teachers necessarily recognise how much difference to career and promotion prospects the money conditionally on offer from the Government would bring about.

Mr. Spencer: Does my right hon. Friend agree that for some members of the NUT this is a blatant political strike and that their sole intention is to cause the Government to reorganise their economic priorities? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential that that view should not prevail?

Sir Keith Joseph: I believe that that is true of some members of the NUT, but I remain convinced that most members have the interests of the children at heart and must be appalled at the damage that is being done to children's education.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that all the teachers unions but the NUT have agreed a settlement means that there is a changed situation? Is there not a distinction to be drawn between the unions which, belatedly, are facing their responsibilities, and other unions, such as the NUT, which do not even know the meaning of "responsibility"? Is this not the moment —perhaps for the first time—for the Government to make a gesture and to do something about extra funding for 1985-86, even if it is only a minimal gesture?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with the first part of my hon. Friend's supplementary question, but not with the latter. It was the NUT which, in December 1984, wrecked the prospect—by walking out of the then negotiations—of extra money from the taxpayer, if the Government had found that the bargain that they seek for extra pay for teachers had then been met.

Mr. Meadowcroft: If the formula that has been engineered by the ACAS intervention is impossible to implement because of the lack of resources available to local education authorities, what other channels for a settlement will there be? Will the Secretary of State tell the House what assurances he gave to ACAS on the possibilities of funding to meet any settlement that it engineered?

Sir Keith Joseph: No such assurance was sought or given. The hon. Gentleman is wrong in concluding that the outcome must founder on the question of resources. It will be for the local education authorities, in considering all the pressures that are upon them, to decide what they can afford in the light of the instalments that might be available over four years, if the conditions set by the Government for the bargain are satisfied.

Mr. Favell: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great concern for the safety of children who are forced to leave school premises without notice being given to their parents? Will he issue guidance to education authorities and to teachers on how the matter should be tackled, both now, during the dispute, and for the future?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am aware of the tragic incident that occurred in my hon. Friend's constituency. However, we cannot be absolutely sure that the child concerned would have been accompanied but for the disruption. I am aware of all that and of the dangers to children. I shall consider

whether there is any guidance that I can give. I am sure that the teachers' unions concerned are well aware of the dangers that they are risking and causing for children, and I condemn them again for the disruption that they are creating.

Mr. Radice: The Secretary of State has told the House yet again that he is not prepared to give local education authorities extra money to help pay for the provisional agreement for 1985. Does he understand that unless he provides more resources, better pay for teachers—which he says he supports—is likely to be at the expense of the provision of books, equipment and the carrying out of school maintenance? Why does he not spend his remaining weeks as Secretary of State arguing the case for more money for education?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government accept that more money in aggregate from the taxpayer is legitimate for teachers in return for what the hon. Gentleman has changed his tune about. Only a short while ago the hon. Gentleman supported the Government in regarding the acceptance by teachers of their duties as part of that which the Government should seek. He has now departed from that. He has said that pay alone should be considered, and he has rejected the Government's view and, I believe, that of the country, that pay should go with what pay is for, and that duties should be part of the bargain.

8. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will seek to provide additional sums of money to resolve the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government have already set aside additional resources for an increase in teachers' pay to recruit, retain and motivate teachers of the right quality and to improve the pay structure and clarify teachers' duties. I very much hope that we are about to see progress in negotiations which will justify the release of those resources.

Dr. Marek: Will the Secretary of State tell us how much these resources would mean to the teacher on the average salary, in percentage terms, if they were accepted for 1986-87? Will he tell us also whether he believes that the teachers who belong to the National Union of Teachers have children's education at heart?

Sir Keith Joseph: It is not possible to give an exact figure without knowing whether the individual teacher would receive promotion. The offer made by the employers in September, based upon the additional extra money available from the taxpayer, would have permitted 74,000 additional promotions. The general answer to the hon. Gentleman is that, for a substantial number of teachers, a substantial increase in pay would have resulted.

As to the motivation of members of the National Union of Teachers, I can go only by the speeches of their leaders, who tend to speak at great length, when they have the opportunity, about the teachers' dispute, without once mentioning the children.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson: What is the current basis for teachers' pay? From his discussions about pay, does my right hon. Friend believe that an independent review looking to the future and having regard to the dispute could only be beneficial for the future structure of teachers' pay?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government accept that the necessary basis for pay to teachers should be such as to permit the recruitment, retention and motivation of people of the right quality. That means changes to the present career and pay structures, as well as an aggregate increase. Regarding the inquiry, we hope to see the ACAS procedure fulfilled, subject to ratification. The point about an inquiry is that those who inquire are not responsible for finding the money. At least with the ACAS procedure, those who would have to pay — the local education authorities — are involved as well as the teachers' unions.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State realise that there are well over 50 questions on the Order Paper that mention the teachers' pay dispute? Will he stop weeping crocodile tears about our children, when the House knows that it is he who is disrupting our children's education? Until he gives more money to the teachers in their just cause, he will be keeping our children out of school. It is time that he went and that we had a new Minister who would see to it that our teachers received more money and that our children go back to school.

Sir Keith Joseph: This particular Minister has persuaded his colleagues in the Cabinet that some extra money is legitimate for teachers on aggregate, but only on condition that they carry out their duties.

Education Support Grants

9. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest progress in preparations for the implementation by local education authorities of the provisions contained in the Education (Amendment) Bill.

13. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many education authorities have made, or will make this school term, fresh arrangements for midday supervision of children in school, thus relieving teachers of the obligation to perform this duty.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Chris Patten): Twenty-five English LEAs have submitted bids or draft schemes and a further 38 have made inquiries about the scheme. Of the 17 schemes which have been approved so far to go ahead this term, none relies upon the voluntary unpaid participation of teachers.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he share my concern that many local education authorities are not taking full advantage of the extra Government money presently available to provide alternative midday supervision? Can he confirm that there is now no excuse for a school not to provide full midday supervision?

Mr. Patten: I share my hon. Friend's concern. He is correct in what he has said. The previous arrangements, which have long been criticised by the teachers' unions and others, have broken down. Our proposals should mean adequate arrangements everywhere.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend accept that the Government's action in making funding available for midday supervision was widely applauded by teachers and parents alike, and that many of those parents are now most

disappointed that adequate supervision is not being provided, with the result that many children have to go home at lunchtime, to their disadvantage?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend. Two thirds of local education authorities have been in touch with us about the new proposals. I hope that the remaining one third will listen to my hon. Friend's robust advice.

Mr. Freud: How many local education authorities will not be able to bid for lunchtime supervision because it would take them into penalty? In those areas, what will happen at lunchtimes, and what will happen to the money that properly belongs to those local education authorities?

Mr. Patten: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has said that he is willing to consider sympathetically any application to disregard expenditure approved for education support grant on midday supervision in 1985-86.

Teachers (Dispute)

12. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what meetings he has had since Christmas with the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: None.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Secretary of State read the report of the Secondary Heads Association, which states that teachers are leaving the profession in droves because of low pay? How does he intend to reverse that drift away from teaching?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am aware that a number, not yet known, of teachers, including good teachers, are quitting the classroom. The Government deeply regret that. It is one reason why the Government have made conditionally available from the taxpayer sufficient extra money to transform career, promotion and pay prospects in return for the acceptance of duties.

Mr. Maclean: Since the ACAS settlement has proved that moderate trade unions can reach a settlement when pay, conditions and duties are discussed together, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Burnham and CLEA committees should be scrapped forthwith?

Sir Keith Joseph: That is the subject of the next question. I must warn my hon. Friend that the ACAS procedure has reached only its first stage. I welcome the progress that has been made, but there is still a great deal of progress to be made, even if the parties ratify the settlement.

Mr. Radice: How many times has the Secretary of State met representatives of the teachers' unions during the year-long dispute?

Sir Keith Joseph: Recently I answered a question and set out the exact dates and details. In general, I have made myself available, subject to overriding duties, whenever representatives of teachers' unions have asked to see me.

Remuneration of Teachers Act 1965

14. **Mr. Haselhurst** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will introduce legislation to repeal the Remuneration of Teachers Act 1965.

Sir Keith Joseph: In response to requests from the local authority associations, I have made it clear that I am prepared to consider proposals for changes in the present arrangements, but before coming to a firm view I would want to be satisfied that any new arrangements would offer the prospect of being a real improvement on the existing ones.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the present arrangements for determining teachers' pay have few remaining friends, especially in the Conservative party, and that if he made it clear that he will have done with them, it could only assist the outcome of the talks at ACAS?

Sir Keith Joseph: I well understand that, and I would be willing to go to my colleagues and ask for legislative time, but first I would have to be satisfied that the proposed alternative arrangements would improve the position. Scotland has arrangements that are roughly similar to what many people wish existed in place of Burnham, but the outcome in Scotland is not noticeably better than that in England and Wales.

Student Grants

15. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the level of student grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received about 300 letters about his intention, subject to parliamentary approval, to increase student grants by about 2 per cent. We consider that this level of grant strikes a fair balance between meeting students' costs and the total expenditure which tax and ratepayers can reasonably be asked to contribute.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister accept from earlier exchanges that there is growing anxiety in the House about the plight of students? Is it not time that the Government restarted the inquiry into student grants that was set up last year, but then abandoned in such a cowardly way in August? Is it not time that that review was published, so that the country can know the strength of the students' claims for decent support and the complete inadequecy of the 2 per cent. offer?

Mr. Walden: The Government have made it clear several times that they have weighed the pros and cons of student loans and have decided, for the present, against them. Without the keystone of a consultative document, it is impossible to construct the arch.

Ancillary Services

17. **Mr. Franks** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of local education authorities have put services ancillary to teaching out to tender; how many private tenders were accepted; and what savings have resulted for each of the past two years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Information in the form requested is not collected centrally, but most, if not all, local education authorities contract out some of their services. A notable example of this is home-to-school transport. Two other services where large savings have been achieved by some local education authorities by going out to tender are school meals and school cleaning.

Mr. Franks: Will my hon. Friend please consider extending the services which are contracted out and give every encouragement to those local authorities which should be doing so and are not?

Mr. Patten: I accept what my hon. Friend has said. The Audit Commission, for example, has estimated that there is scope for saving about £50 million on cleaning services in schools.

Save British Science Campaign

20. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from Professor Joseph Lamb and Dr. Denis Noble, FRS, of the Save British Science campaign.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received an invitation to meet Professor Lamb and other representatives of the Save British Science campaign and he has agreed to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: At that meeting, will special attention be given to the problems of post-doctoral research?

Mr. Walden: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there are problems at present. I am inquiring into those and discussing them with academics.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. McDonald: Is there a level below which the Government would not want the pound to slide, and if it continues to slide will the Government step in to raise interest rates?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady is aware, the Government's main priority is to keep inflation down. It is also important that interest rates do not rise. We do need to have regard to inflation. As the hon. Lady is well aware, there have been no changes for some time.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity of reminding all those who are interested in the future of BL that the company has already received over the past 10 years about £2 billion from the taxpayer and that it is unlikely that the taxpayer will wish to provide any more money for BL? Therefore, BL's future may be best safeguarded if it finds allies and friends in the private sector, whether they come from this country or abroad.

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, no one can doubt the Government's commitment to the future of BL. The taxpayer had already put in over £2 billion, and in addition there have been £1·5 billion guarantees under the Varley-Marshall assurances. We are determined to create an internationally competitive BL, and that is what the discussions which are now under way are aimed to achieve, namely, is to protect jobs in the long term.

Mr. Kinnock: When British money has rightly gone into modernising BL, what possible excuse can there be for serving it up gift-wrapped to a foreign competitor?

The Prime Minister: As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman heard, at the moment the Varley-Marshall assurances in the form of guarantees are of the order of £1·5 billion, in addition to the £2 billion that has already been put in. That cannot continue. We are concerned that BL should be competitive and the talks that are being entered into now are designed to achieve that and so secure the future of a strong BL.

Mr. Kinnock: Would those or any other assurances offered by General Motors be valid in the case of BL? Are they not subject to change in decisions at any stage by a company that took over BL and its various assets?

The Prime Minister: The discussions are taking place with General Motors with the full support and approval of the BL board. I have already mentioned the large sums, both of taxpayers' money and existing guarantees, that have gone into BL. BL will have a better future if it is in a position not to make a continuous demand on the taxpayer, because doing so means that it takes money that could well go to other things.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister not accept that security of work, of technology and of orders, both for BL and for its component suppliers should command the highest priority? Can she tell us how she thinks any objective of security can be achieved by ensuring that a further set of colonisation takes place in the British economy?

The Prime Minister: I note that the right hon. Gentleman appears to be against inward investment although many regions in his own Principality are competing for inward investment from other countries. One of the problems is that the capital required to create new models has to be spread over a comparatively small number of cars compared with our European competitors. The only way to safeguard jobs in BL, as elsewhere in the economy, is to compete successfully in domestic and international markets.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my right hon. Friend accept that many people who have built BL, and in this case Austin Rover, up into a successful enterprise resent very much the implication that somehow or other it is a financial leper? If General Motors and Ford are willing to back BL, why cannot our Government show the same faith?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend should not forget that the backing through the Government by the taxpayer, not the Government, has been enormous. During the lifetime of this Government it has been £1·5 billion. Again he must not forget the guarantees that rise annually. One is concerned for the future of BL. One is concerned, therefore, to have a competitive BL. That is what the talks upon which we have embarked are designed to achieve.

Dr. Owen: If British helicopters were to go to Sikorsky, if airborne early warning was to go to Boeing, and if Land Rover was to go to General Motors, would the Prime Minister draw the line at 44·5 per cent. of the United Kingdom car market going to Ford? At the very least, will she give us an assurance that that would be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. May I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that this country

also invests extensively overseas? There have been many years when our direct investment in the United States has exceeded the States' investment here. That investment gives us enormous advantage in the invisible returns, which help the balance of trade every year. Yes, we do have inward investment. Many right hon. and hon. Gentleman seek it for their constituencies. We have outward investment, which achieves income.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend find time in a busy day to issue a word of reassurance to 8,000 Land Rover employees in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: As I have already indicated, discussions are taking place with General Motors with the full support and approval of the BL board. Those discussions are about both Leyland Trucks and Land Rover.

Q2. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Short: Is the Prime Minister aware that she is in breach of the constitutional principle of ministerial responsibility in blaming her civil servants for the Westland leak? How can she possibly rely on the same principle to prevent them from giving their version of the truth now that they have been blamed publicly?

The Prime Minister: No. I understand that there have been negotiations with the Select Committee on Defence and that the head of the Civil Service will be giving evidence—I believe tomorrow—before it.

Mr. Walters: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the print unions harassed and bullied the very conciliatory Thomson organisation to the point of despair, until it sold to Mr. Murdoch? Are they not now paying the price for their very shortsighted greed?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend is right. Newspapers, as well as other industries, must not shrink from coming into the present technological age.

Q3. **Mr. Allan Roberts** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Roberts: Why was an official in the Cabinet Office reprimanded or disciplined for his conduct in contacting the private offices of Ministers to see whether they were available for a meeting about Westland on 13 December? What form did the reprimand or disciplinary action take?

The Prime Minister: Disciplinary action is not a matter for me.

Mr. Marlow: Given the enormous success of the Government's programme of privatisation of nationalised industries, in that the consumer is better served, the nation has better value for money and the people who work in those industries are doing better than they would have done otherwise, will my right hon. Friend consider privatising such nationalised services as education and housing?

The Prime Minister: I accept my hon. Friend's description of the success of privatisation. He is aware that the effect of selling council houses is to privatise many of the assets that were previously owned by councils. I deeply regret that there are not so many direct grant schools as there were, and I believe that we must consider further the question of education.

Q4. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lloyd: Does the Prime Minister insist that Miss Colette Bowe corroborates the statements that the right hon. Lady has made to the House? If that is so, why is the right hon. Lady preventing her from appearing before the Select Committee?

The Prime Minister: My statement to the House on 23 January and my speech on 27 January were checked for accuracy with all those concerned, including the head of the Civil Service, who conducted the inquiry.

Mr. Thornton: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity this afternoon to restate her own and her Government's implacable opposition to dealing with any organisation that uses terrorism to achieve its ends? If so, will she offer a reassurance to those forces in South Africa that wish to bring about peaceful change concerning the proposed meeting between the African National Congress and a Foreign Office official, which seems to fly in the face of those principles?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, Ministers have not met terrorist organisations, although there have been occasions, when we have had the Presidency of Europe, when we have met a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation as part of another delegation. As for the ANC, we uphold our normal principle that we are absolutely against violence as a method of pursuing political ends. There have been no ministerial contacts. There has been contact between officials and the ANC.

Q5. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hamilton: Since it is quite clear that the public do not believe that the Prime Minister has told the truth about the Westland matter, will she now agree to appear in front of the Select Committee so that it can drag out of her the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

The Prime Minister: I totally reject the hon. Gentleman's remarks in asking his question.

Mr. Conway: Does my right hon. Friend share the widespread concern about the reluctance of the Indian Government to co-operate in the fight against drug trafficking, when it is reported that 49 per cent. of the heroin in the United Kingdom comes through the port of Bombay? Is not the Indian Government's reluctance a disgrace?

The Prime Minister: From what I know of the Indian Government, they will do everything they can to co-operate in drug trafficking. They are just as anxious as the rest of us that we should try to stop this evil traffic.

Q6. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lewis: Despite today's token reduction in petrol prices, is it not time that the right hon. Lady acted against the oil companies' cartel, in the interests of the British motorist consumer?

The Prime Minister: I understand that petrol prices are going down. Like the hon. Gentleman, I hope that they will go down further and faster.

Q6. **Mr. Neale** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Neale: Has my right hon. Friend taken note of the commendable performance by miners at Tilmanstone colliery in Kent, who have reduced the cost of production from £120 per tonne to £40 per tonne, brought the pit into profitability and saved 500 jobs? Is this not an excellent example and a vindication of all that she has been saying about the need to be productive and efficient as the best way to protect jobs and expand the market for British made goods?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that remarkable example to our attention. There has been a dramatic improvement in productivity at Betteshanger and Tilmanstone. That dramatic improvement has led to the saving of one pit and to the possibility of saving the other.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like to make a brief announcement about the business for tomorrow.

In place of the debate previously announced, the business will now be as follows:

Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate on British Leyland. Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "The failure of the Government to provide cancer screening for all women at risk". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you can help us. Since when has it been the doctrine of Parliament or the British constitution that Ministers, however exhausted, have no knowledge of reprimands within their own Departments? Is this the way that we work?

Mr. Speaker: That genuinely is not a matter for me.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you can give some guidance. Yesterday we had a statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in relation to British Leyland. Today we have had a series of answers by the Prime Minister. At no stage has any indication been given to the House of a major defence implication which is of profound importance in that there is a subsidiary of Land Rover called Self-Changing Gear which not only supplies components to the British main battle tank but also is in contention for a £200 million contract in relation to the American battle tank, and its main competitor is General Motors, to whom it is considering selling.

Mr. Speaker: I have no doubt that that may arise tomorrow.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of what the Leader of the House has said. I understood that, when there is a change of business, any Member of the House can raise questions on the business statement. Therefore, I should like to raise a question on the business statement.

Mr. Speaker: Since the Leader of the House made his announcement on a point of order, I will take one point of order relating to it.

Mr. Heffer: The point of order I should like to raise, Mr. Chairman—*[Laughter.]* I understood the Speaker of the House to be also Chairman of the House.

I ask that the Government also find time tomorrow for a short debate on the letter which has been reproduced in today's *Morning Star* from the solicitors of News International to Mr. Bruce Matthews, dated 20 December, which clearly shows that Mr. Murdock and his friends had already decided some long time ago that action should be taken to provoke a strike and to sack the workers in Fleet street. The Leader of the House should be prepared to consider a short debate on that important issue after 10 pm.

Mr. Biffen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The business for tomorrow that I have announced relates to an Opposition day. Although I realise that the point raised by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) is of general interest, I cannot offer any Government time after 10 pm.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to mislead the House? Surely, the article in the *Morning Star* was saying that the newspaper involved was taking legal advice as to what——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we have disposed of that matter. It is not one for me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Genuine?

Mr. Skinner: Yes. It is as genuine as the series of misunderstandings that the Government have — *[Interruption.]*

Today, we have had business changed on a point of order. That practice is not greatly welcomed by those hon. Members, in particular Opposition Members, who like to use the rare opportunity to ask questions about the change of business. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) would have been within his rights to ask the Leader of the House about the business to which he wished to refer. I may well have done the same. In future, it would be as well to follow the well-worn practice of a business statement with business questions, and not a point of order when there is a change of business, from whichever side and for whatever reason.

Mr. Speaker: Entirely genuine. It is an unusual way of doing it, but it has been done.

Right to be Self-Employed

3.36 pm

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to clarify the criteria used to determine self-employed or employee status for the purposes of tax and other legislation.

The Bill gives every worker the right to be self-employed. Any Government trying to create a climate for job creation must study the ease with which new firms can be started. That means producing a society in which people at all levels can make decisions, break into new ventures, and seek to exploit their skills and talents in new markets. It means a society with a variety of jobs and types of employment.

The Government have made huge strides in making the conditions right for people to start firms. There have been more than 100 measures, including the highly successful enterprise allowance scheme, and the proposals of the Secretary of State for Employment for lifting the burdens on business will help to remove some of the obstacles to success.

Further purposive action on taxes and regulations could bring rapid results. The Bill is a helpful measure, under which anyone can agree with his employer that he or she is henceforth to be treated as self-employed merely by completing a simple form. The Bill gives the Inland Revenue a right of appeal through the tax commissioners where there is any doubt about employee status. Employee status can be determined only by the commissioners where there is evidence that the taxpayer gains his earnings from one employer under one contract of employment only and where the taxpayer has the right, under his contract of employment, to be reimbursed for authorised out-of-pocket expenses. In other words, the Bill will change the burden of proof so that the inspector of taxes will have to make a case that a person cannot be treated as self-employed, whereas at present he has a complete and arbitrary discretion.

The Bill is entirely in line with Conservative philosophy. Our people should be encouraged and permitted to take the step of self-reliance and the route to independence. Self-employment is one of the most obvious escape routes from that sterile employee culture which was recently condemned by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

The immediate effect of the Bill will be to enable people to work without their employers having to calculate PAYE, and worry about the hassle of national insurance contributions, or about being taken over the threshold for registration of VAT because they have employed people. Employers will be able to employ people under contract when needed, without the fear of becoming locked in by employment protection laws and the other burdens on businesses. It is a short cut. At a stroke, employers will be relieved of that burden.

This one act, which the Inland Revenue seems so determined to prevent, would enable hundreds of thousands of people to be employed by small firms. It would, dramatically lower the cost of employing them, without lowering wage levels. The Treasury would still get its money in the end, albeit from self-employed people and after a delay.

The most important aspect concerns not the creative supply side effects but the iniquity of the retrospective way in which the Inland Revenue determines self-employed and employee status. It has been waging a battle against the self-employed. The PAYE system is terribly convenient for the Inland Revenue because employers become unpaid tax collecters. The Revenue has been examining particular groups of workers to see whether it can challenge their self-employed status.

I was appalled to see in a written answer in column 387 of *Hansard* of 13 July 1983 that between 1979 and 1983, 7,000 self-employed taxpayers engaged in the film, television and radio industry—I hope that the BBC is listening — were reclassified as employees, following reviews by the Inland Revenue. A further 100,000 people in part-time or occasional employment were also reclassified by the Inland Revenue.

There are no cut and dried rules, and that leaves employers and employees vunerable. I refer the House to the case of the umbrella man. *[Interruption.]* It has nothing to do with wets. *The Times* of Saturday 15 June reported about an umbrella man with a highly successful business, James Ince and Son, which employed people on a self-employed basis. Following a review by the Revenue the firm, which had had no idea of the consequences, was faced with back taxes and national insurance contributions because the self-employed workers were reclassified as employees. That small firm faced a bill for £19,000. But for the fact that it had a freehold, the firm would have been put out of business.

There may or may not have been justice in that case, and there are hundreds of others. The National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses and the Institute of Directors are pressing for this type of reform. We must have defined criteria so that small businesses are left in no doubt about the status of their employees. Small businesses cannot afford fancy accountants and professional advice. They rely on professionals to audit their accounts, and they mus make judgments as they go along.

The Bill would also end the bureaucracy surrounding the issue of sub-contractors' exemption certificates which enable self-employed people in the construction industry to be paid gross, without deductions. That system is thoroughly wicked. It effectively operates as a licence to work. To get an exemption certificate to be treated as a self-employed sub-contractor one must show that one has been employed for three of the past six years. If one cannot show that, one cannot become self-employed.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), who has drawn my attention to cases in his constituency of unemployed people who cannot take up employment because they cannot get the necessary certificate. The Treasury says that it has made a concession and that, if our constituents will put up a bond for £2,500 to the Revenue, they may operate as self-employed people. That is Catch 22, since those who are unemployed, those who are seeking work, have neither the money nor the record of employment with which to meet those criteria. That is invidious.

Pessimists in the House will say that the day of full employment have gone for ever. I believe that that is arrant nonsense. Some jobs are there now if only we made it possible for people to fill them. We must take the market at its own value and we musttake the opportunities which it holds for our people. Our children should be encouraged to see self-employment as a realistic and admirable option in the schools. Far from fearing change and progress,

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

which follows from changing times and technology, we should embrace it. The Bill seeks to provide a secure base from which to do that.

3.46 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I should like to oppose the Bill. Although I do not understand everything that the hon. Gentleman said, I understand clearly what he was saying in relation to self-employment in the construction industry.

One of the great curses in this country has been the development of self-employment—the lump system—in the construction industry. Over the years the lump system has undermined craftsmanship, good workmanship and good products for the people in the industry. Some employers — a worthy number of employers — are opposed to the lump in the construction industry. However, it has grown up and it is consistent, with the philosophy which the Government have developed in the past few years.

It is a myth to believe that everyone can be self-employed, and it is rubbish to suggest that the answer to our unemployment problems is self-employment. It has done great damage to the people of this country and to our industries and I believe that the House would be wrong to allow the Bill to go through. Even though it is a minor Bill with no great consequences, it shows the basic philosophy and attitude of many—not all—Conservative Members.

The Bill would also undermine trade union rights which have been built up over hundreds of years. It also undermines the safety and health legislation that has been necessary to protect the interests of working people in industry over the years. Without making a great speech, I hope that hon. Members will oppose the hon. Gentleman and tell him that there is no place in our country for legislation of this kind.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nominaton of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 125.

Division No. 59] **[3.48 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cartwright, John
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cockeram, Eric
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dykes, Hugh
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freud, Clement
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grylls, Michael
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hancock, Michael
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Malins, Humfrey
Marlow, Antony
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Nicholls, Patrick
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Penhaligon, David
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Wainwright, R.
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Neil Hamilton and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

NOES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Crowther, Stan

Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duba, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Garrett, W. E.
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McTaggart, Robert
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Radice, Giles
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. William McKelvey and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Michael Forsyth, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. Christopher Chope, Mr. Michael Grylls, Mr. George Gardiner, Mr. Michael Fallon, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Mr. Robert B. Jones and Mr. Stefan Terlezki.

Right to be Self-Employed

Mr. Michael Forsyth accordingly presented a Bill to clarify the criteria used to determine self-employed or employee status for the purposes of tax and other legislation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 March and to be printed. [Bill 76.]

Orders of the Day

Housing and Planning Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I must announce that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. May I have your advice on this Bill? It is the custom and the constitutional right of the House that Scottish business be dealt with by Scottish Bills which are considered by Committees on which only Scottish Members serve. All too often the Government have breached that tradition by putting clauses that relate to Scotland into Bills largely concerned with England and Wales. That practice puts Scottish Members at a severe disadvantage.

We have the same thing with this Bill, in which five major clauses relate to Scotland. I and other Scottish hon. Members are serving on a Standing Committee which is considering the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which contains many clauses that are exactly the same as clauses in this Bill. The Minister in charge of the Bill in Committee is the Minister with responsibility for local government and housing in Scotland. Because he is serving on that Bill, he will be unable to serve in Committee on this Bill and a Scottish Office Minister with no responsibility for housing and local government will be in charge of it.

As the spokesman for the Opposition in the Committee considering the Housing (Scotland) Bill, I should like to make the Government an offer. I am prepared to facilitate the Government in removing the Scottish clauses from this Bill and adding them to the Housing (Scotland) Bill as new clauses. Scottish Members have some right to protection from the present abuse. What we really require, of course, is an assembly in Edinburgh.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the hon. Gentleman's point of order, but this is not a matter for me.

Mr. Forth: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. How can Opposition Members suggest that Scottish Members are free to participate in English legislation but that there is a system of apartheid which prevents English Members from participating in and supervising what is going on north of the border?

Mr. Allan Roberts: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to turn this into a battle between England and Wales and Scotland, but I hope to serve on the Committee which considers the Housing and Planning Bill, 90 per cent. of which concerns England and Wales, and I could not possibly have the knowledge or ability to speak on the Scottish clauses. The same is true for most of the hon. Members who will consider the Bill because Scottish law is completely different from the law affecting England and Wales. It is a fog and a mystery to English and Welsh Members. It is an imposition on English Members, even if they represent outposts of Ireland such as Bootle, to put Scottish clauses into the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has made an interesting suggestion, which I am sure could be taken up through the usual channels.

4.4 pm

The Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction (Mr. John Patten): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has one underlying theme — the need to create the conditions in which available resources, private and public, human and financial, are released and mobilised to improve the conditions in which our people live, especially to help improve housing conditions and to tackle problems in the inner cities. I intend to consider housing, inner cities and then planning.

The Bill marks one more stage in the development of the Government's housing policies. We can claim major practical achievements for our housing policies since 1979, but, perhaps even more important, we have won the argument about housing in the long term. Quite simply, the intellectual landscape of housing policy has changed, and the centre ground has shifted. Nothing could illustrate that more vividly than the gradual change in the attitude of the Labour party to our policy of council house sales. That policy has been so successful that we have irreversibly altered the perceptions of tenants of the choices and opportunities which should be open to them.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: We have irreversibly changed the landscape of housing policy. There is no turning back.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Since the Government came to power, the status of council tenants has been transformed. The Bill would give tenants still more choice and still more control over their own homes.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Perceptions of the role of public housing are changing all of the time and I believe that they are changing in all parties in the House.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Nobody would deny that public sector housing faces major problems. There is a legacy of bad stock, aging stock, bad design and poor workmanship. Much good work is being done by housing managers in local government, but too much of it is still remote from tenants and insensitive to their needs. In some authority areas, such basic tasks of property management as keeping down rent arrears and arranging that houses are not left empty are sadly neglected.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Money alone is not the answer. Resources were poured into public sector housing in the 1960s and the early 1970s, and look at the result. Too often, the result has been vast, impersonal estates — the concrete desolation in which few people would today choose to live. The problem in public sector housing does not lie with money alone. Of course there is a continuing role for public sector housing, but in the rest of this century and the next century it will be different. It will be smaller and more specialised. The old bureaucratic and paternalistic monopoly which has characterised public sector housing for too long must go.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Major changes of attitude will be needed. There will have to be more choice, more responsive management and, above all, an enhanced role for tenants.

Mr. Heffer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: We must get new agencies involved to draw on the resources of the private sector and to diversify the provision of rented housing.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: One more passage, and I shall give way to at least one hon. Member.

The keynote is not doctrinaire privatisation, but diversification and an end to bureaucratic control. I believe that the whole House shares that hope. I am sure that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), to whom I now give way, shares that view.

Mr. Heffer: Is the Minister denying that thousands and thousands of ordinary people would not have lived in reasonable houses had there not been local authority housing? Does the hon. Gentleman think that that is wrong? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, because sometimes great mistakes were made in relation to those houses, the principle is wrong?

Mr. Patten: I recognise, as I said in my speech, that public housing will continue to have a role as far as I can see, albeit in a more specialised and narrower focus. The hon. Gentleman would do more for the city he seeks to serve if he persuaded the council to bring back into use the 10,000 or so empty flats and houses in Liverpool today.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: No, I would like to make a little progress. I am saving the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) for later.

The first three clauses make important changes in the right to buy. They increase discounts on flats by 10 per cent. and provide flat purchasers with better protection against high service charges in the early years after purchase.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I am sure that the Minister's words will be of great comfort to many of my constituents who have been frightened to buy their own flats because of high service and repair charges, which sometimes they did not know about until after the sale.

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is indeed sad that high service charges deter so many people from buying flats, particularly in city centres where it is so important to try to introduce more diversified forms of tenure.

We are also introducing the right to a loan enabling purchasers to spread the burden of particularly heavy charges. Sales of flats in the big blocks in our major cities have so far been relatively few. The provisions in the Bill will encourage further sales.

Clause 1 also helps mobility by providing that the period during which discount must be repaid on resale will be reduced from five years to three.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Does my hon. Friend accept that the people in Leicester who live in flats will be particularly grateful for the news he has announced today, and for the passing of the Bill, as only seven flats have so far been sold in Leicester, East? Can my hon. Friend ensure that the new proposals will be sent to the director of housing on Leicester city council to encourage him to sell more flats as the people in Leicester want to be able to buy their own flats?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend has on previous occasions brought to my attention and to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the goings-on in Leicester council. As he suggests, I will certainly write to the director of housing and to the leader of the council and ask them to explain to their tenants the new opportunities that we intend to give in the Bill should it become law.

The Bill is not simply about purchase. It will also enable those who continue to rent to have more choice. With my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's consent, local authorities can already transfer ownership of estates to other bodies. Clause 4 will provide a statutory basis to protect the rights of tenants under such transfers. Under clause 6, local authorities will be able to retain ownership——

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): What about clause 5?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman must not fear. I shall come to clause 5 in a moment.

Under clause 6, local authorities will be able to retain ownership but to delegate the management of particular estates to other bodies. At present, authorities are able to delegate their powers only to tenant management co-operatives of which there are already about 20, with, happily, more on the way.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my hon. Friend accept that the period he picked, five years, is a spit in the wind? Would he also accept that a three-year period is also a spit in the wind? I would like to hear the intellectual argument giving the reason why there has to be any period whatsoever, particularly when that inhibits people from places like Copeland who want to move and get new jobs in other parts of the country.

Mr. Patten: By reducing the length of time from five years to three years, we are attempting to increase the opportunities for job mobility. We shall keep the whole matter under review in further legislation. I believe that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) would very much like me to give way to him.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Minister remember that the Conservative manifesto of 1983 stated that it was the Government's goal to make Great Britain the best-housed nation in Europe? How does the Minister set that alongside the Government's record of reducing to 20p in the pound the spending on housing, thus making British spending on housing as a proportion of national income the lowest of any country in the Common Market?

In clause 5, which ignores the 5 million damp and unfit houses in the country, the Minister introduces the power and authority for councils to flog off parts of their estates to private companies. Does the Minister recognise the validity of a comment made to me by a tenant in Stoke Aldermoor, in Coventry, South-East, on Friday night, who said that if the measure is carried out, there will be islands of affluence in council estates within a sea of effluent? Is that not the intention of the Bill?

Mr. Patten: I thought, with respect to the hon. Gentleman, that I was probably wrong to give way because the hon. Gentleman can never resist making a speech when he should be asking a question.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's first point, and his reference to the 1983 Conservative manifesto—and an excellent manifesto that was—it is indeed our intention to make housing in this country the envy of the rest of Europe. That is why we are seeking through the Bill and in other ways to mobilise all possible resources to bring that about. On many estates, like the one to which the hon. Gentleman referred, developers have been brought in to refurbish rundown council houses by Labour councils. Successful schemes such as those at Regent park, Salford or St. John's green in North Tyneside relieve authorities of a problem and give an enormous boost to the character of an estate, introducing a variety of tenures. Where blocks are only partly empty, it is fair that the remaining tenants should receive a home loss payment when they move.

Clause 5 will enable such payments to be made. It also allows an extra ground for possession under the tenants' charter. That will be similar to the existing ground available since 1980 to local authorities when they carry out redevelopment. In all cases, tenants who move will be given suitable alternative housing as they are given suitable alternative housing by councils when councils redevelop their own blocks.

Moreover, in the case of schemes involving private sector redevelopment, we are proposing the extra safeguard that all schemes will have to be approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Opposition are rightly and reasonably concerned about the welfare of tenants as are the Government. That is why the Bill safeguards them.

All these proposals demand a fresh approach from housing managers. That will give public sector landlordism a much better name than it sometimes has at present. The Government want to help in that process and that is why clause 7 enables my Department to grant-aid training and to provide better finance for more management innovation. I will give way to the hon. Member for Bootle if he thinks that now is the right time.

Mr. Allan Roberts: I hoped that the Minister might give way a second time.

If the Government say that they are trying to do something about charters, why are they launching a major attack on the owner-occupier? Why are they cutting improvement grant moneys in their housing investment allocations to local authorities? For example, Sefton borough council asked for £5·5 million but it only has £1·1 million. Sefton can give only the minimum number

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

of improvement grants to owner-occupiers and only in improvement areas. Why, under this Government, has there been at least a fourfold increase in the number of owner-occupiers who have had to default on their mortgages because they could not keep up with their payments?

Mr. Patten: The number of people defaulting on their mortgages is minute — 0·2 per cent. of all people holding mortgages. Since coming to office, we have spent a substantial sum on home improvement grants, £2·5 billion. This year, it is currently running at £500 million. If Sefton borough council wants to spend more on home improvements, it can do so.

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): To underline his point, will my hon. Friend confirm that in 1979 the outgoing Labour Government gave only £94 million towards home improvement grants? Therein lies the difference between the Conservative and Labour Governments.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is peculiar that the Opposition refuse to acknowledge such progress as has been made to the tune of £2·5 billion over seven years. Yet, in one year, the Labour Government were prepared to spend only about £90 million. That is an absurd point.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My hon. Friend has been very tolerant in giving way. I am grateful to him. Under the Bill, my hon. Friend will enable councils to privatise some of their estates, should they wish to do so. We understand that many councils, including several enlightened Labour councils, will pursue that course of action. What will my hon. Friend do for those of our unfortunate citizens who live in the areas currently controlled by those Labour councillors who will be the Labour party's next prospective parliamentary candidates—the Hattons, the Bernie Grants and so on? Those citizens will still be imprisoned if council housing is controlled by these Labour barons who have no intention of providing decent housing. Can we move one stage further and require these councils to take action?

Mr. Patten: The first piece of advice I would give those tenants is to vote Conservative in the borough elections in May. The second piece of advice to them is to shame — perhaps one should use the word "whitemail"—their Labour councils into doing the same things that excellent Labour councils such as Salford, Oldham and North Tyneside are doing because they care for their tenants and want to improve their lot.

I turn to the inner cities. I hope that there is no hon. Member who says, "There is an easy solution to inner city problems" or "It is a matter of doing this or spending that and it will be all right." We already have a considerable range of instruments—some of which date back to the important 1977 Labour White Paper on inner cities—in the urban programme, derelict land grant, urban development grants, urban development corporations and the urban housing renewal unit. However, we need to do more to mobilise private sector resources in the regeneration of our inner cities. That is why part III enables my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to give financial support for expenditure on urban regeneration. That will be an important power. It is well precedented. It will complement the powers that Ministers in other Departments already have to give financial assistance to industry and to training programmes. Part III is drawn in wide terms. It will be used selectively by Ministers. Our initial intention is to use it to tackle one problem with which existing grant regimes cannot cope. We are open to suggestions from hon. Members on ways of using this new power.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my hon. Friend accept that some of us are a little concerned about the wording in clause 11, which refers to

"creating an attractive environment or ensuring that housing and social facilities are available"?

Does my hon. Friend accept that there are facilities other than social facilities that should be provided — for example, shops? People would not want to live on a housing estate that did not have shops. It might be desirable to incorporate facilities other than social facilities. Would not a better word be "associated" facilities?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right. We shall consider that point in Committee and tighten the provision. It is not within my gift to put my hon. Friend on the Committee——

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: —but it is within my gift to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for York.

Mr. Gregory: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as there have been so many interventions during his excellent speech. He has referred to inner city regeneration and the need to move more towards the private sector, as 62 per cent. of the population is housed by the private sector. As we are talking in terms of £75 million of housing stock in England being held by local authorities, will my hon. Friend consider in Committee imposing a requirement on local authorities to publish, at least annually, for council tenants in houses or in flats, the differential between continuing to rent accommodation from a local authority over a typical 20 to 25 year period and purchasing that property? Clearly, the effect would be to shift 9 to 10 per cent. more people from the public sector to the private sector. At the moment, many of the people who come to my surgery and to the surgeries of other hon. Members do not fully understand the equation. It is simple: it makes sense to buy one's house.

Mr. Patten: That is an intriguing idea. I had not thought of it before. It is one that we must consider, along with repair costs. I shall draw that idea to the attention of my city council—Oxford city council—which has put out a scandalous little leaflet, as so many Labour-controlled councils have done, entitled "Bob and Betty buy their council house", which failed to point out many of the advantages to Bob and Betty of buying their council house.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: I shall certainly not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on the same point before he moves on?

Mr. Patten: I return to the ways in which urban regeneration grants can be used.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: The areas to which we intend to apply this grant generally share three characteristics.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way, on the same point?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) must not persist if the Minister has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Patten: A number of areas share three characteristics. First, they have a lot of derelict land, which is disused, underused or obsolete property——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: Secondly, they are too big to be regenerated or redeveloped——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East is not interested in listening to an exposé of the powers of the new grant, which will be of great use to his own city.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East must resume his seat. It is clear that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Patten: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman. I do not intend him any disrespect. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not give way again.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way on the same point?

Mr. Patten' Secondly, those areas are too big to be regenerated or redeveloped by a single project supported by urban development grant. Thirdly, individual buildings in the area cannot be dealt with because of surrounding conditions.

We shall be looking first for areas such as those—heaven knows there are enough of them—where the private sector is willing to contribute its share to regeneration. This use of the new power will be known as urban regeneration grant. I am placing in the Library copies of a paper giving more details.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: We are considering also whether this power can be used in connection with housing to back up the urban housing renewal unit's initiatives under the direction of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment—the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young).

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams) *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will forgive me if I do not give way. I have already given way quite a lot. I am conscious of the fact that many hon. Members will seek to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Part II provides powers to establish simplified planning zones. They, too, will be of particular importance in the inner city. This is a radical new idea to speed up inner city and other development, exactly complementing urban regeneration grant.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: Each local planning authority will have to consider whether to establish one or more simplified planning zones.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: They must prepare a scheme for each zone. The scheme will grant planning permission for any development of the type or types that it specifies. For 10 years thereafter, developers will have the certainty that such a development can be carried on without the need for a planning application or the associated fees. I hope that those points will be widely welcomed. I believe that many local authorities will want simplified planning zones. The Bill provides that, if a local authority will not prepare a scheme, any person can refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment who can then direct the authority to prepare or alter a scheme.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: I give way, for the last time.

Mr. Adley: I am truly grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. He is aware of my concern and that of the Christchurch council, which has been fighting to retain its character against the predatory activities of some large building companies. Will he make it clear beyond peradventure that local authorities will not be required under clause 9 to designate areas as simplified planning zones? As the Bill reads, it appears to make it incumbent upon local authorities to do so. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent certain parts of the country are extremely worried about this provision.

Mr. Patten: I know of my hon. Friend's concern and that of other of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Councils will be required to ascertain whether there are any areas within their responsibility that could benefit from designation as simplified planning zones. If they find that there are no areas that would benefit from such designation, it will not be incumbent upon them to designate one area here or there merely for the sake of it. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that reassurance from me. I shall consider the matter again in Committee to ensure that we arrive at exactly the right wording.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I turn to other planning aspects of the Bill that, to a lesser extent, complement urban regeneration grants and simplified planning zones, which together will be such valuable additional tools to those that we use already to implement our urban policy. We hope that the grants and zones will be another significant step forward for the inner cities.

Thirdly, and lastly——

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: No, I shall not give way. Part IV is very important. It requires——

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that I rise on behalf of a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends who want to take advantage of my hon. Friend's extraordinary generosity in allowing important interventions to be made, especially those relating to simplified planning zones. I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you will restrain the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) from disrupting the process of the debate. His behaviour has caused my hon. Friend to refuse, quite understandably, to allow a number of us to intervene to make important additional points about the urban development of the south of England, and Dorset, especially.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The point of order of the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) gives me an opportunity to say that there is great pressure on time in this debate. Many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to participate in it, and interventions inevitably lengthen speeches.

Mr. Patten *rose*——

Mr. Nellist: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the greatest respect, I am sent to this place by 50,000 constituents, half of whom are council tenants. When the Minister makes controversial remarks in his opening speech in introducing such a crucial Bill, it is my duty, and that of other Members, to attempt to question him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman is hoping to catch my eye, and I hope that he will not push his luck.

Mr. Patten: I understand the deep concern of those of my hon. Friends who represent counties such as Dorset. I appreciate that they do not wish planning powers to be abused. In responding to an earlier intervention I attempted to explain that it will not be the duty of councils to define simplified planning zones at all costs. It will be their duty to ascertain whether any areas within the borough or district would benefit from simplified planning zone status. That is the whole, complete and utter story.

Part IV requires the specific consent of the planning authority to the use of land for purposes involving the presence of hazardous substances. At present there is a yawning gap in planning control. It is possible, without any material change of use or any specific consent, to introduce highly dangerous substances on to land. We can no longer allow this to continue in the interests of public health and safety and of the environment.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: The theme of the remainder of the Bill is the efficient, simple and speedy operation of the planning system. An example is the provisions of schedule 8 on the award of costs against unreasonable planning authorities and applicants. I know that that is an issue of interest to some of my hon. Friends. Part V is another example of simplification. It brings to an end duplicate procedures for the control of opencast coal mining.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: We are using the Bill to get rid of some redundant statutes. The Bill makes equivalent provision for Scotland as it does for England and Wales, except for housing, an issue which was the subject of points of order earlier, when Mr. Speaker was in the Chair. Provisions appropriate to Scottish circumstances are contained in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is presently in Committee.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister now give way?

Mr. Patten: Some of the provisions in the Bill are radical while others remove unnecessary regulation and introduce simplifications. Provisions to make regulations work more effectively may seem to be rather humdrum, but it is important that we get planning law right. Even if Opposition Members are not in agreement with every element of our policy, I hope that they will accept its general drift. I believe that we are all devoted to one end, that of mobilising public and private resources and releasing the energies of individuals, tenants, communities, company directors, managers, councillors, officials, investors and others to play a part in improving their own areas.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Patten: No, I shall not give way.

Where it is necessary to retain or increase control in the interests of safety, amenity and the environment generally, the Bill does just that. I am as hopeful of that as I am of the further important changes in housing which the Bill introduces, and the message of hope that it offers to the inner cities.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I commend the Bill to the House.

4.38 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"the House declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which encourages the eviction of council tenants from their homes in order for them to be redeveloped and sold to other people, which will allow planning powers to be taken out of the control of elected authorities, which departs from the partnership principle for urban regeneration, which fails to reverse the real cut in the urban programme planned for 1986-87 or to provide any new resources to deal with the massive problems of urban decay, housing shortage and disrepair amongst home owners and tenants; and regrets the missed opportunity that the Bill presented to give new rights to millions of tenants to control the management of their public sector housing, if they wish."

First, I give the assurance that the Opposition will facilitate procedurally anything that can be done to transfer the Scottish material from the Bill to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, whether we disagree with it or not. I think that there is a general feeling on both sides of the House that that material would be more properly set within the provisions of the other measure.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The planning provisions relating to Scotland that are set out in the Bill could not be placed in the Housing (Scotland) Bill because they would be without the long title of that measure.

Mr. Rooker: It is quite easy to amend a long title. That is no barrier.

We are debating housing and the other matters to which the Minister referred. The Bill is a somewhat miscellaneous measure but, essentially, we are debating the right of the citizen to have decent housing. That is what housing policy should be about. Housing is not confined to tenure, finance or the roles of central and local

government. All these factors play a part, but only a part. The formulation and conduct of policy must be aimed at achieving the central objective of providing decent housing for our people. If the policy does not achieve that, it will be seen by the consumer to be irrelevant.

The housing crisis——

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: I shall not give way now. I shall do so in a few minutes. I do not want to delay the House unnecessarily, but I have quite a lengthy speech and I wish to complete it.

The housing crisis is all around us. We hear so from Conservative Members who say that they do not want houses in their constituencies. The nature of the crisis in their constituencies must be different from what it is in the constituencies of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Britain has a diversity of housing, so no single plan can be held up to meet the crisis. There is no question of anyone arguing that that could be the case.

It is a statement of the obvious to say that we should aim for homes that are dry, allow privacy, and are well maintained and secure. For millions of our fellow citizens that is not achieved. To be precise, 4 million households in England suffer that injustice. Two out of nine homes in England are either unfit, lacking in basic amenities, or in need of substantial renovation. That adds up to a coalition of several million badly housed people, owners and tenants alike. They will not thank anyone for seeking to erect artificial barriers of tenure and finance between them and a decent home. The best definition of decent housing is that in which people are happy. Happiness comes from control over one's life, including one's home. To meet that objective, we need a coherent housing policy. We must test the Bill against that aim.

The Government's short answer is that they are not selling enough flats, but they fail to appreciate why. I claim that people will not buy what they cannot sell. It is a bad bargain at any price, as the owners of defective concrete houses have discovered.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: I shall give way shortly.

So far, 29,000 flats have been sold compared with about 700,000 houses since the change in the law in 1980. That represents about 4 per cent. of a local authority flats stock of 33 per cent. of all council housing. It appears from clause 3 that the new right to a loan—I say right to a loan and not right to a home, because that is not what the Bill is about—is nothing more than a right for today's tenants of flats to become owners to pay for the necessary large scale renovation of our nation's flats. It is a loan secured against the flat, so their very home would be used to pay it off. That comes at a time when 72 per cent. of council tenants are on housing benefit.

Why is there no promise in the Bill of reinstatement grants as there is in the Housing Defects Act 1984? We know that that is a con, but at least the promise of a grant is there if the resources are made available to back it up. The recent report of the Department of the Environment on the condition of the public housing stock is daunting reading. It should be sent as a financial health warning to those thinking of buying a flat. The Government know —because they are their figures—that £18·8 billion is required for public housing. No less than £6·5 billion of that is for flats.

From the Government's report, flat repairs will cost between £2,800 and £14,000 per flat, with an average of £5,000. Flat dwellers should be warned. The restriction on service charges does not last for ever, and the potential cost for flat dwellers buying on that basis is frightening. It would not be a bargain, even at a 90 per cent. discount, to be trapped in a home that one could not leave and on which one must borrow to pay off service charges to make good the structure. If the true financial burden is made clear, the Government's efforts in the Bill simply will not work.

If the Government were serious about housing need, especially rented housing need, they would have proposed a portable discount for flat dwellers that would have enabled those who wanted to buy to do so, thus leaving a flat available for rent. The Labour party proposed such a scheme in Brent and it is working well on an experimental basis. That could have been taken up by the Government and we regret that they have not done so.

Flats in tower blocks can be made highly desirable places in which to live, not by piecemeal selling off, but by imagination and flair of management, which needs to be as intense in the public sector as it is in the private sector. For a start, porters in tower blocks would be a sight more effective than entryphones. There are examples in my constituency of the doors being ripped off. Wages would be recouped by the reduction of damage and the consequent higher occupancy. The tenures can be mixed as easily as they are in houses. There are many examples from around the country, some of which are identified at length in the report on tower blocks by the South Bank polytechnic published by the Institute of Housing a year ago. We urge action along those lines and we regret that the Government have failed to take it.

Mr. Forth: What is the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party in assisting people in those matters, for example by offering discounts when they want to buy property, whether it is a flat or a house? More important, what is his attitude to the local authorities' policy of threatening to repurchase, or repurchasing what tenants have bought from the authority in the first place?

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening. I have just castigated the Government for not taking advantage of providing a portable discount for flat dwellers. The implication is that we would give general support to that as an alternative to the Bill. I shall try to meet the hon. Gentleman's other points later. I shall make my speech in my own way.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman has put out a little bit of a scare story about service charges to flat dwellers. In the private sector people buy their flats and manage the service charges. I know that the hon. Gentleman says that they are too high, but in a lot of the private sector they are not, and on the Continent people buy their flats and they cope with them there. Why is it such a problem in the public sector?

Mr. Rooker: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman goes to the Vote Office and reads the Government's report on quality and the need to spend on renovating public sector housing stock, which they are trying to sell off at a greater rate. The hon. Member should look at the figures, because they are exactly the ones that I have quoted.

The Bill does little for the homeless. A few nights ago I visited some families stuck in bed and breakfast

[Mr. Rooker]

accommodation in the Bayswater area. Families have been placed by authorities in 10ft by 10ft rooms. One of those authorities not only has 1,500 empty homes, but has so managed to arrange its finances as to underspend its meagre housing investment allocation by a cool £1 million.

One young mother, in a hotel since last August with no offer or visit from those who placed her, explained that she cannot get on a doctor's list, cannot use the local nursery, cannot cook properly and has had three different rooms in a hotel that is subject to fires. In the first few weeks, when she was under terrible strain with her new baby, she rang her local social services department for help and advice and was told, "It is OK, whatever you do to your baby you will be OK." She will never trust a local authority social services department again. That is the type of pressure under which young families have been put by being forced to use that sort of accommodation. For the homeless, the formulation of policy is irrelevant, unless it brings about a decent home. I will gladly take the Minister to meet that family if he wishes so that he can explain how the Bill will help them in their circumstances.

Before today's maiden housing speech by the Minister, as a Back Bencher he is on record as asking only one question on the subject. On 25 July 1979 he asked about housing construction starts in the public and private sectors.

Mr. Nellist: Seven years ago?

Mr. Rooker: He was a Back Bencher for only one and a half years. Just after his election he asked a question about housing construction starts in the public and private sectors. In answer to the hon. Gentleman, the Minister referred him to statistics which clearly showed that Labour were building 5,400 new homes a week during their period of office. Has he asked the question again since he became Minister for Housing? If so, he would have been told that the Tory record since 1979 shows not 5,400 new homes per week, but ony 3,400 per week—2,000 per week short.

Mr. John Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Member for the close care he has shown in looking up things that I said on earlier occasions. I am flattered by that. Does the hon. Gentleman recall that in his summing up of the debate on the inner cities he said that he abhored, in housing terms, playing the numbers game? Does he agree that much more important than bandying about statistics—amusingly put as his assertions are—he would be better advised to concentrate, as the Bill does, on ways and means to bring back into use hundreds of thousands of empty flats and houses in the public and private sectors, which would help the homeless and others? Does he agree that making use of the resources available is of paramount importance?

Mr. Rooker: I could not agree more, and I shall deal with that in a few moments.

Most of the worst housing in Britain is in the private sector—usually in the urban areas where Labour local authorities own the worst quality public sector housing. Since they own most public housing, it follows that they own most of the worst housing. Those urban areas are usually represented here by Labour Members, which is one reason why the Labour Government were seized of the problem and organised their affairs so that they could build 2,000 more new homes a week than the Tory Government have done since 1979. Had the Government simply continued what the Minister suggests was Labour's meagre housing programme, Britain would have 500,000 more homes than it does now. That would make a massive contribution to solving homelessness.

Mr. John Patten: We do not need them.

Mr. Rooker: The Minister says, "We do not need them." However, household formation is greater than the population increase, and every serious analysis shows that the Government need to build at least as much as the Labour Government did. That is so even with the many empty houses.

In any circumstances, but especially Tory circumstances, flats and houses that are needlessly standing empty in the private and public sectors are a disgrace. They should be homes for people, not monuments to inefficiency or prejudice. If the Government were serious, we would be debating the compulsory acquisition of some of the 540,000 empty homes in the private sector where, in the words of the Minister in answer to my question on 19 December, the

"owners do not wish to occupy or sell them but are deterred from letting by the Rent Act."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1986; Vol. 89, c. 264.]

That prejudice is preventing the homeless from having decent houses.

In the public sector, a much lower proportion—2·7 per cent.—of the stock is empty, as against 4·1 per cent. in the private sector. That still means 110,000 empty homes. The smaller percentage gives no excuse for failing to condemn the reasons why some of that stock is empty. I should also put on record the fact that the landlord with the worst record and the biggest proportion of its stock standing empty is central Government—6·6 per cent. of the housing controlled by the Government is empty. I know that it is a small number at 19,000, but that would go a long way to meeting the needs of homeless families.

We should not pretend that all the reasons for empty houses in the public sector are financial. Some management practices are not as good as they might be. A lettings policy where the allocations are made on a quarterly basis is inefficient. It simply means that homes remain idle while awaiting the quarterly meeting. There is another quaint management practice called normalisation. It means that when a tenant leaves, gangs of workers, sometimes several and not all at the same time, are sent in to rip out any improvements that the tenant may have done, such as fitting ornamental stone fireplaces or pine wall cladding. I cannot think of a more futile, inefficient practice, besides being an insult to the previous tenant. Neither practice can be blamed on the House, the Opposition or, indeed, the Government, and I demand that they cease forthwith in the interests of the homeless.

Local authorities who issue telephone numbers so that people can inform them when their properties are empty are at least aware of defects in management, but authorities who send notices to properties that have been empty for 12 years, asking the tenants whom they rehoused 13 years ago whether they still wish to move, should make some heads roll.

Privatisation of management, as envisaged by clause 6, is not required to make some sense of this patent nonsense.

That does not mean that present management sizes are appropriate. No fewer than 23 authorities manage between 20,000 and 30,000 dwellings; another 16 manage between 30,000 and 40,000 dwellings; 13 authorities try to manage between 40,000 and 50,000 dwellings; and seven authorities are desperately trying to cope with the management problems caused by between 50,000 and 120,000 dwellings. I speak from the experience of my constituency, because the authority with most public housing is Birmingham, part of which I represent. The scope in that size of management for the bungling, depersonalised approach is amply taken up. Clause 6 also envisages tenants becoming involved in management, to which I shall return later.

Contrary to what the Minister said, the Bill is short on new rights. It is about time that the leaseholders of flats had the right to obtain their freeholds. That right was given to leaseholders of houses by the Labour Government in 1967. As the Bill is drafted, it will create two classes of leaseholders of flats, which will cause further difficulties. The Bill should strengthen legislation on racial harassment in housing. Without that, the freedom to live in peace and tranquility is at risk. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) will return to those points when he replies to the debate.

We must spend a little time on clause 5, which forms the central part of our reasoned amendment. The Labour party has set out many of its housing proposals in the document "Homes for the Future". We are committed to genuine choice, variety of tenure, and greater control of housing by the people. The choice between renting and buying cannot be genuine if there is a shortage, and clause 5 provides a further reduction in freedom of choice under the Conservative Government. The party that boasted of the tenants' charter in 1980 is reduced, in 1986, to removing the right of security of tenure of millions of council tenants so that their homes can be done up and sold to others.

Council tenants who love their homes, are happy in them, and who wish to remain as tenants of the council, or to form a tenant management co-operative with neighbours will be unable to sleep peacefully if clause 5 remains in its present form. As it stands, their choice, freedom and, indeed, liberty to remain in their homes are under threat. I make no accusation that it is a further export to the United States, but it is as serious as that. Tenants will lose the possibility of staying in their homes.

Mr. Nellist: I remind my hon. Friend that the Minister was asked by one of his colleagues, who has now left the Chamber, whether tenants would be told by local authorities how much better off they would be were they to buy their homes rather than pay rent on them. Does he agree that information should be given to all tenants showing how much extra rent they would have to pay to balance housing revenue accounts when, because of council house sales, fewer people shoulder the debt charges created by the building of council houses? If the Minister is interested in the provision of information for a balanced argument, he should explain to the House and to tenants by how much rents will increase because of that factor.

Mr. Rooker: The right to information is also missing from the Bill, but we shall return to that in Committee.

Clause 5 is required to kick tenants out because existing grounds for their removal are suspect. Our excellent Library staff could not find a legal case on this issue. However, one example is about to come before the courts in the county of Cleveland, where at Langbaurgh three tenants are sitting tight on the Spencerbeck estate. I should say at the outset that that is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Mr. Tinn), not the constituency of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt). That estate contains 12 to 16-year-old Parker Morris standard homes — good in themselves but laid out appallingly. The lack of privacy and proper road access meant that many became hard to let or, more correctly, hard to live in. There are about 800 homes, and Langbaurgh district council was desperate to do something, so it sold a group of 177 houses to a developer——

Mr. John Patten: A Labour council.

Mr. Rooker: I do not seek to hide the fact. I shall come to that point later, and I shall balance the argument.

Quite why the developer could not take the empty properties plus all those that the council could empty voluntarily, as it claimed that many wanted to leave, I am still unclear. That would have had the advantage of mixing up the tenures and giving scope for improving the layout. It would have preserved the liberty and freedom of choice of those who wanted to remain in their homes.

Those three tenants now live in the middle of a building site. For people to knock on a person's front door and ask why he is still living there because his home is to be theirs is unpleasant, to put it mildly. We know that for the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young)—I regret that he is not present—it cannot sound too unpleasant. On the "TV Eye" programme last autumn he said that the Bill would be a "useful reserve power in those rare cases where, for whatever reason, one person is impeding a modernisation scheme". Unlike that or any other Minister, I think, I have been in the three homes concerned and I suggest that before we reach the relevant stage in Committee somebody from the Government Front Bench follows my example.

Homes on that estate sold under the right-to-buy legislation are not affected. That shows that there is nothing inherently wrong with the quality of the construction of the houses. The three tenants could buy, but they do not want to. We would support their right to buy. Does the Minister support their right to rent their home? That is the question to which he must address himself.

On Second Reading of the Housing Act 1980, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, after having talked about the new rights in the Bill, said:

"Many tenants, having put their work into the dwelling, will want to own it and thus attract the capital benefit for themselves. If so, the way ahead will be clear. But there will be no pressure." —[*Official Report*, 15 January 1980; Vol. 976, c. 1434.]

Those three tenants could get out of the jam that they are in by exercising their rights under the right-to-buy legislation. Because they do not wish to do that, they will be hauled before the courts and evicted. That is the only reason that that will happen.

The rub here is that the standards of some of the houses have been reduced by the developer. The three-bedroom, two-toilet houses have been reduced to three-bedroom, one-toilet homes and they carry only a six-year NHBC certificate, not the normal 10-year one.

It is not too late for me and my hon. Friends to ask our colleagues in control of Langbaurgh district council, the

[Mr. Rooker]

leaders of which I met when I visited Cleveland, to come to a compromise with the developer which allows for freedom of choice and protects the right of those three families to live in tranquility in the homes that they love.

Mr. Forth: Perhaps this is the point at which the hon. Gentleman could clarify his party's position. In the context of rights and tranquility, which the hon. Gentleman is rightly raising, will he give an assurance to all those who have bought their council houses that his party will give them tranquility by guaranteeing that never in the future will it give local authorities any powers to compulsorily repurchase any properties that have been purchased from them?

Mr. Rooker: The answer to that is an unequivocal yes. Contrary to the lies that were told at the last general election, that has never been Labour party policy.

Mr. Holt: The hon. Gentleman mentioned me and my constituency and I want to make it clear to the House and everybody else that those properties are in the constituency of the hon. Member for Redcar (Mr. Tinn). The three tenants came to my surgery because they thought that they could get nowhere with the Labour council in charge or their local Member of Parliament. As a matter of convention I had to refer them back to their Member of Parliament in the hope that there would be a dialogue which would assist those people because they are nice people living in nice houses.

Mr. Rooker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has dropped a note to my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Mr. Tinn), who is not present, to tell him that he——

Mr. Holt: I did. I have had no reply.

Mr. Rooker: —intended to mention him this afternoon.

Mr. Forth: You raised it.

Mr. Rooker: I do not deny that I raised it. I have not criticised my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar. I gave the facts so that there was no misunderstanding about which constituency the three homes are in. That was in the first paragraph of the point that I made about Langbaurgh.

That is an example from a Labour-controlled authority. It is only fair that I give an example, just as scandalous, from one of the authorities where the Liberals keep the Tories in power. I choose at random the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

Fulham court is a mixed community in every sense of the word. It has 372 families, black and white, living in harmony with several generations of the same family around the estate. Ninety per cent. of them voted to remain there rather than be kicked around the borough and the community be destroyed when the Tory-Liberal council announced that it wanted everybody out so that the flats could be done up and sold off. There is not much sign of the tenants' charter there.

In August 1985 that council was funding 127 families in bed and breakfast hotels compared with 39 in April 1984, despite the fact that the officers of the Hammersmith and Fulham council had estimated that it would work out £5,000 a year cheaper for each homeless family to be housed in the empty flats in Fulham court, even as short-life homes. There were 46 flats empty in blocks which will not be empty for another year and a further 52 are empty in blocks which are not expected to be clear until 1988, by which time we hope that the controlling group on that council will have been justifiably booted out. Such is Tory-Liberal action in Fulham. Today about 170 of the flats are empty and 330 families live in temporary accommodation.

Mr. Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Does that relate to the by-election or the Bill?

Mr. Rooker: I am just giving another example of local authorities seeking to evict tenants who have security of tenure under the Government's legislation which is being removed in clause 5.

Recently there were attempts to dispose of one of the empty blocks to the Addinson housing association as shared ownership along with a restrictive covenant tying the hands of any future council never to use any of the other eight blocks of flats for rented housing. To its credit, Addinson said no.

I call upon the Liberals to condemn what is going on in Fulham and join the Labour party and Nick Raynsford in calling for freedom of choice for tenants to remain in their homes and within their community.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): After that mini party-political speech on relation to the by-election, may I say that the hon. Gentleman has made it clear that there have been two authorities, one run by the Labour party and one by the Conservatives with Liberal support, which have pursued the same policy. I hope that he will agree that we are both striving for local authorities to have the power to make decisions on such matters, whatever decision might be made, not for the Government to impose eviction against the will of the local authority. I hope that the Labour spokesman on housing will confirm the right of local authorities against that of the Government.

Mr. Rooker: Let us be clear that the Labour party is opposed to evicting council tenants for the sole purpose of their houses being done up and sold off. The hon. Gentleman did not condemn that practice. I have condemned it under the Tories, the Liberals and under a Labour authority because it is immoral. It is as simple as that. We still have had no condemnation of it from a Liberal or Social Democratic Member, and we await with interest their contributions.

There are other examples from both Tory and Labour-controlled councils where tenants are being treated as worse than second-class. In November the Appeal Court in the case of Eileen Short and the borough of Tower Hamlets showed what a farce the tenants' charter is on the issue of consultation when tenants are about to be removed for such a purpose. That aspect must be strengthened because the Government's legislation of 1980 has been found to be defective and we shall expect Ministers to remedy it in Committee.

From time to time there are many legitimate reasons for homes and people—both owners and tenants—to be separated. There are slum clearance schemes; road schemes; dare I say it, airport construction schemes and schemes to unlock parcels of land for house building. In all those there is due process. In no case is someone kicked out of a home for it to be done up and sold off.

It may be that the Tories say that there is no need for more rented housing in the public sector, in which case they would do well to look at the 1983 manifesto which has been referred to earlier. On page 25 it said:

"Britain needs more homes to rent, too, in the private sector as well as the public sector."

We are not dogmatically opposed to inputs of private sector cash to improve bad housing. We are for freedom of choice and the liberty of people. Those two things need not be incompatible. Clause 5 makes them incompatible in certain circumstances. That is why we wish to make major amendments to the clause.

To redress the damage that would be done by the clause I want to put on record a quote from Labour's programme for 1976. It is as relevant now as it was then and highlights what I have just been speaking about:

"There is a growing danger in this age of bureaucracy that the rights and freedoms of citizens will be infringed by the large and powerful organisations with which we have increasing contact. We believe there is a need to tip the scales away from public and private concentrations of power back in favour of the individual. There are several ways of doing this."

When we reach clause 6 in Committee we intend to hold the Government to the commitment given by a Minister at the Dispatch Box at Question Time on 4 December that an amendment from the Labour Opposition to give council tenants a legal right to obtain control of the management of their homes, if they wish,

"may well receive support from the Government."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 296.]

We want that commitment, given in good faith by a Minister, incorporated in the Bill.

The Bill proposes that councils may make management agreements. That is nothing new; it has been Labour party policy for years. Because progress has been so slow, we said in our document "Homes for the Future" that tenants should be able to trigger the change. That is not in the Bill although the Minister paid lip-service to it. Tenants should be trusted because they know best. There are dozens of examples of successful tenant management co-operatives in Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham and London. With resources and commitment they have shown that they can control effectively and fairly the management of their housing. Many of the people are unemployed, single parents, blacks and Asians. It is an abuse of language to refer to them as elitist. They, not the landlords, know best how to run their housing. Some of the existing rules governing tenant management co-operatives need strengthening. After all, they were laid down 10 years ago by the last Labour Government in circular 8/76 which is still the relevant circular.

I want to deal briefly with inner cities and urban renewal. Along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) I carried out a chore this morning which hon. Members are not often asked to do. Usually we are asked to open housing developments, but my right hon. Friend and I went to his constituency in the east end to close a house. There are five co-operatives in that part of London dependent on GLC funding and they cannot get a decision from the Department of the Environment. The people, many of them Bangladeshis who have no proper homes, have put an enormous amount of time and effort into trying to get housing co-operatives off the ground. Without a decision by 31 March they are doomed. Houses are deteriorating to such an extent that they are no longer fit to live in; hence the closure.

On behalf of my right hon. Friend and the five co-operatives which operate under the Solon secondary co-operative, I demand that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gives reasons for the delay and an assurance that a decision will be forthcoming. A total of 150 homes in the Adelina, Sylhet, Grand Union, London Fields and Spitalfields co-operatives are to be lost. Is that what Ministers really want? We should like an announcement about a decision tonight.

Mr. Tony Banks: I knew of the visit that my hon. Friend was making today. Is he aware that I have asked the Department for decisions on about 40 outstanding consents? The answer that comes back is that the Department is giving careful consideration to the matter. The Department is blocking the decisions and waiting for the matter to drop on 31 March. My hon. Friend has highlighted an absolute disgrace and scandal.

Mr. Rooker: I hope that Ministers will reconsider the promises made when they decided to abolish the GLC. The only money that the GLC had to fund the co-operatives was capital receipts. Ministers promised that that money would be transferred. That is no good to a borough such as Tower Hamlets which does not have much in capital receipts. Firm commitments were given about the nature of the funding. I hope that we will not see many more houses being closed. I do not like it, nor do my right hon. and hon. Friends. There is no excuse for it because money is available. It is not forthcoming because of bureaucratic hold-ups in the Department.

I wish to comment briefly on clauses 9, 11, 12 and 13. No hon. Member who represents an inner city area can be satisfied with Government policy. The position has got worse over the last few years. New measures are needed. The urban regeneration grant—I say "grant" although on reading the Bill I think it need not necessarily be a grant but may be a loan—is not a new resource. According to the financial memorandum, there will not be a larger input of cash. That is confirmed by the submission of the Building Employers Confederation on the Bill.

The urban programme announced by the Minister on 27 January of £225 million is in real terms £20 million down on the expenditure for 1985-86 of £237 million. If we add on 5 per cent. for inflation, the Minister should have announced an urban programme of £245 million so that pound for pound it would be of the same value. Is the new scheme really to be paid for by cuts elsewhere in the programme or, worse still, by further cuts in the rate support grant? I cannot believe that is so. My constituents and constituents in other inner cities will despair if that is the only answer the Government can give to the problems of inner cities.

The Minister for Housing was deprived of the opportunity to reply to the debate on 11 December when the House was treated to a charade by the chairman of the Conservative party. We are still awaiting a legitimate, rational Government response to the crisis in the inner cities. We need a commitment of new resources. It was reported in *The Guardian* on Saturday that the Prime Minister had ordered Ministers to make a statement this week on the inner cities even though it was not known which Department would make the statement or if there was more money available. That shows the disarray the Government are in.

Mr. Steen: The hon. Gentleman is arguing that more cash should be given to inner cities. Is that not exactly what the Secretary of State has done in the rate support grant by shifting resources from the shire counties to the inner cities? Does the hon. Gentleman believe that more and more funds will solve the problem of the inner cities?

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Gentleman has an advantage over me. I suggest that he uses the advantage of representing an inner city area and a rural area. He should go to see what is happening to the area that he used to represent.

Mr. Steen: I have done that.

Mr. Rooker: He tells us that the inner cities are getting money from the shire counties. That is pathetic.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister to justify why in the recent announcement of partnership allocations for the next financial year every single partnership authority, with the exception of Birmingham, has had a cut in its partnership allocation in cash terms as well as in real terms?

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend asks a fair question. I do not know why Birmingham seems to have done better than other areas. I do not wish to abuse my privilege by making a constituency speech, but Birmingham's inner city deprivation is the largest both in scale and intensity of any inner city, according to the Z index on the census. The other areas are only a little behind Birmingham. That is no excuse for the relative cuts between other inner city areas and Birmingham, compared with inner cities overall and the shire counties. One thing that is clear above all else is that my inner city constituents, of whatever age, black or white, will no longer tolerate resources coming to their area accompanied by workers on buses. They want the jobs. I warn the Minister that people are fed up to the point of desperation. They want the opportunity to work in schools and in the local environment, but they are not being given that opportunity.

Whenever there is a local problem, the Government say that they have spent £20 million on the area and ask why people have rioted. However, what happens is that big business with outside workers comes into the area to do the work. It does not spend money locally and it takes off again. That leaves local people as bitter and depressed as they were before the work was carried out.

A way must be found to involve those who live in the inner cities. All of them have skills. I cannot accept that there is any such thing as an unskilled person. Everybody has a skill to contribute, even if it means cutting across demarcation rules, rigid local government rules and the collective agreements of certain building firms. A quota of the work must be provided by consortia to local people. They will spend the money locally. That will assist in the regeneration of the economy of the inner cities. It cannot otherwise take place.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No, I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

It is in the interest of business that the work provided by the urban regeneration grant should not be tied into the special planning zones. Furthermore, business should not refuse to work with the local authorities; it is in its interest to co-operate with local authorities. The simplified planning zones may be used to circumvent some of the planning laws, but I do not believe that anybody who is involved in construction activities on a national scale will wish to ride roughshod over the wishes of democratically elected local authorities.

It is in the interest of business to join local authorities in the consortia approach and to use whatever means may be provided by the Bill. Local people could be put on the boards of consortia which could also ensure that a quota of jobs is provided for local people. It is an extremely modest proposal, because no details have been given about the money that will be provided. Simplified planning zones could work. However, we have heard in this debate that certain Conservative Members of Parliament do not want to have simplified planning zones in their back yard.

The Minister must have been told by the building industry that some Conservative-controlled local authorities do not want simplified planning zones. He must have been told that these authorities will use the appeal procedure that is provided for in the Bill and will come to the Minister who, because he is one of their friends, will not grant permission for simplified planning zones. The Minister must also have been told that he will probably grant consent for simplified planning zones against the wish of local authorities in urban areas because they are Labour controlled and that if he does so the companies will be piggy in the middle of a political dispute. He must have been told, too, that they do not want to fall out with the local authorities, whatever the nature of their political complexion. It would be better if the Minister said that he would grant permission, otherwise he would have a hell of a problem on his hands. He would be accused of acting in a partisan manner towards Conservative controlled authorities.

The Bill defies belief in respect of the simplified planning zones. A firm promise was given on 11 May 1984 relating to the consultation paper on simplified planning zones: that conservation areas would not be included in the simplified planning zones. There was also a promise that national parks would not be included in the simplified planning zones. However, national parks are referred to in the Bill. Is the omission of conservation areas from the Bill a complete reversal of Government policy? Is the Minister saying that he will allow green belt and conservation areas to be included in the simplified planning zones? If so, he will find that he is faced with objections and opposition from all sides of the House. It may be an omission. The Government may have forgotten their promise — something that they are not unknown to do. Nevertheless, that commitment was given in writing and it has to be made good.

It cannot be denied that the Bill is good in parts, bad in parts and neutral in parts. It may benefit certain individuals and companies. It may result in more jobs and faster regeneration of the inner cities but the points that are contained in our reasoned amendment are entirely valid, and that is why we shall vote for it in the Lobby.

5.25 pm

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has addressed the House for 49 minutes. It seemed to some of my hon. Friends to be a great deal longer than that—as, most emphatically, it seemed to be to me. It may be, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it seemed to be a great deal longer to you as well.

I remind the hon. Member for Perry Barr that quality of speech and length of speech are not the same thing. I would not dream of accusing the hon. Gentleman of deliberately misleading the House. If I were to do so, you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, the hon. Gentleman deliberately failed to remind the House of a key aspect of the policy upon which his party fought and won the last general election.

The hon. Gentleman said that freedom of choice and liberty for people were at the centre of his party's policy. By a strange accident, I have with me the exact words of the Labour party manifesto of June 1983. The hon. Gentleman must forgive people if they doubt the words that he used this afternoon at the Dispatch Box, because the policy of the Labour party, including the hon. Gentleman, who did not distance himself from that policy when he fought his campaign in Perry Barr, was contained in its June 1983 manifesto. It said that Labour would

"end enforced council house sales, empower public landlords to repurchase homes sold under the Tories on first resale and provide that future voluntary agreed sales will be at market value."

Those words were deliberately misleading. Stripped of the cloak with which the Labour party sought to engulf them, they mean that there would be an end to the right to buy, that if there were to be voluntary sales there would be no discount and that if any person who was a former tenant wanted to sell the house or flat that he had bought he would first have to offer it back to the local authority that had previously been its owner. That was the Opposition's policy.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, of all people.

Mr. Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: No, I have just said that I will not give way.

Mr. Roberts: Why not?

Mr. Gow: Because at the start of this debate Mr. Deputy Speaker appealed for short speeches — advice that was ignored by the hon. Member for Perry Barr.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr, as official Opposition spokesman, disagrees with his predecessor's policy. I respect the view of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). He still believes in the policy that was set out in the Labour party manifesto of 1983. The hon. Member for Perry Barr, who is so keen to present himself as a man of principle, perceiving the electoral albatross that the Opposition have hung about their neck by seeking to end the right to buy, is trying to lead the Labour party away from these words, of which, to the hon. Gentleman's discomfiture, I have reminded him this afternoon.

There is something else that perturbs the Opposition. Since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister arrived in Downing street, 902,000 public sector dwellings have been sold, the great majority to sitting tenants. That of course is a great achievement. Even the Opposition have to take note of the truth. Those houses and flats were built by local authorities with the purpose that they should be occupied in perpetuity by tenants to whom we have offered, and given, the choice of which the hon. Gentleman spoke — the choice which the Opposition have sought to deny.

It is of course because my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction well understands that the overwhelming majority of the British people, if given the choice, would prefer to be owners rather than tenants that he has brought forward this excellent Bill, on which I congratulate him most warmly.

My hon. Friend quite rightly has proposed that there should be increased discounts in respect of flats because, although a total of 902,000 dwellings have been sold since May 1979, only a small proportion—about one in 20—were flats. My hon. Friend rightly proposes to give an extra discount for flats.

There is one point which even the hon. Member for Perry Barr got right. He asked why a tenant of a flat should buy his or her flat when it would be difficult to resell. I think that I have not misunderstood the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Allan Roberts: It is impossible in most cases.

Mr. Gow: The Opposition agree with me, as I hope they will agree with what I am about to suggest to my hon. Friend.

Part of the problem in selling flats is the value placed upon them by the district council or by the district valuer. When a flat is in a tower block, whether on the fifth, the tenth or the fifteenth floor, and the local authority is invited to place a value on that flat, how does the wisest housing officer, the wisest director of finance, place a value on the flat, as he is of course required to do? If the tenant, disagreeing—as well he might—with the value placed on the flat by the local authority, appeals to the district valuer, which under section 128 of the Housing Act 1985 he has the right to do, what then does the wisest district valuer say?

I am surrounded by chartered surveyors on these Benches, and I hope they will confirm what I am saying. How does even the wisest district valuer place a value on the first flat to be sold in a block, whether on the fifth, the tenth or the fifteenth floor? There is only one way in which one can find out the open market value of that flat. That is to give it to the finest estate agent when it is empty. There are plenty of empty flats in tower blocks which are controlled by the Labour party — alas, there is no problem about finding an empty flat.

I do not know whether I shall have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee which considers the Bill. If not, I hope that some of my hon. Friends will table an amendment in Committee to require that a tenant, if dissatisfied with the original value fixed by the council and with the valuation made by the district valuer—neither of whom is in a position to give a proper judgment—shall have the right to require that a flat as similar as possible to the one which he is seeking to purchase shall be sold and put into the hands of the finest estate agent in the area. No doubt some of my hon. Friends will be able to provide such a service.

Mr. Butterfill: If I may assist my hon. Friend, as a chartered surveyor I know that the experience of many of my colleagues in the profession is that, when acting as valuers to building societies, they have been unable to sustain the level of value put on the property by the local authority and, indeed, by the district valuer. That frequently occurs.

Mr. Gow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I believe that, if what I have suggested followed, we would find

[Mr. Gow]

very much lower prices being fixed for flats than those which have been fixed in the past. Therefore, the great majority of tenants — particularly with the increased discount proposed by my hon. Friend the Minister — would face the real prospect that the amount due in mortgage interest, especially after tax relief if they were entitled to it, would be dramatically less than at present.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gow: No. I gave way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) because he is a chartered surveyor and was on the very point, but I am now dealing with a slightly technical point.

Mr. John Patten *rose*——

Mr. Gow: I will of course give way to the Minister.

Mr. Patten: Will my hon. Friend accept it from me that, regardless of whether he serves on the Standing Committee, the important point he raises is one to which Ministers will give serious consideration in the passage of the Bill? Secondly, will he accept that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I are deeply indebted to him for many of the ideas and concepts in the Bill, which are his and not ours?

Mr. Gow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Gow: No, I am sorry; I think I ought to get on.

My hon. Friend is proposing that, if a tenant has been a tenant for 30 years and is living in a flat, the maximum discount shall be increased from the present 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. I want to put a suggestion to my hon. Friend, and I hope that I will not be arraigned under the Official Secrets Act 1911 if I say that this is an idea which I discussed with my officials when I held the office which he now holds. If we are going to allow discounts of up to 60 per cent. after 30 years' tenancy in respect of houses, why do we not allow the discount to increase for every year after 30 years? We are engaged in a radical policy. Why not say that, if a person has been a tenant for 40 years, in the case of a house there should be an entitlement to a discount of 70 per cent. and, in the case of a flat, under my hon. Friend's proposals, a discount of 80 per cent.?

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Gow: I will not give way again. It may save the time of the House if no hon. Member tries to intervene.

My hon. Friend will remember that when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces piloted through the House the 1980 legislation, the qualification period in order to buy a council house or flat was three years. In the 1984 legislation, which was introduced by my hon. Friend's predecessor, the three-year period was reduced to two years. I therefore ask my hon. Friend, again in order to increase the opportunity to purchase, which is at the centre of the philosophy of the Conservative party, whether he will consider in Committee reducing the two-year qualification period to one year. That would be greatly welcomed by tenants.

Mr. Nellist: What happens to the rent——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is being very unfair to other hon. Members who hope to speak in the debate. If such interventions continued, very few hon. Members would speak at all.

Mr. Gow: shall deal with what I regard as an omission from the Bill. To my regret, there is no measure in this important Bill designed to revive the private rented sector. The Rent Acts, which were first introduced 70 years ago with the purpose of offering protection to tenants, have, in fact, injured the very people whom they were designed to help. They have injured them because the supply of privately rented accommodation has been and still is diminishing. Whenever a property falls vacant, most landlords do not look for another tenant. On the contrary, landlords try to sell.

If there is to be an increase in home ownership — home ownership in England has reached the all-time record of 63 per cent. — it goes without saying there must be a diminution in other forms of tenure. Landlords are treated with inequity over security of tenure and rent control, but what is more disturbing is that today there is a supply of unused or under-used accommodation which would be brought into use were it not for the Rent Acts.

There would be three advantages if we could bring about that reform, which I believe is long overdue. The first is that a landlord, when his property became vacant, would be able, reasonably, to look for a new tenant instead of automatically seeking to sell. Secondly, we should be able to bring into use accommodation which is at present under-used or unused. Thirdly, we should be able to attract private sector capital into building new houses for rent in the private sector.

If we could revive the private rented sector, it would make more accommodation available and improve mobility. How should that be done? In respect of future lettings and tenancies — not in respect of existing tenancies—it would be right to allow the terms of the tenancy to be agreed between the landlord and the tenant. If that were to happen, the supply of privately rented accommodation would increase. Furthermore, those tenants who were in a less favourable financial position would be entitled to housing benefits as private sector tenants today are. If my hon. Friend the Minister thinks that that goes too far, I hope that he will consider removing from the present shorthold provision the requirement in Greater London and the tenant's option outside Greater London to have a fair rent registered.

I repeat the congratulations that I offered my hon. Friend earlier on the Opposition's supreme discomfiture. The great majority of the British people are better housed today than ever before. Home ownership has reached record levels. It is the preferred choice of the people. The speech of the hon. Member for Perry Barr was great in length but short in wisdom. I commend the Bill to the House, as did my hon. Friend.

5.43 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I propose to concentrate on the Bill's provisions on housing, but I should first like to comment briefly on parts II and III.

On special planning zones, I am surprised that the Government have not produced realistic evidence to support the idea that they clearly hold, that essential development is held up by the application and operation of the existing planning mechanism. It is not realistic merely to point to the success of enterprise zones, because

they involve tax incentives. It would have been much more sensible to try a feasibility test of special planning zones in inner-city areas where there is a tremendous need to encourage new employment opportunities and new development of all kinds.

I take the point made by the Building Employers Confederation, that if authorities have been awkward and used the planning mechanism to thwart developments, they are hardly likely to be the first to set up special planning zones and if the Minister has to be brought in to establish them, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) said, there will be the possibility of a knockdown drag-out political battle.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the Bill's deficiencies, as drafted, is that the procedure necessary to set up special planning zones could lead to two public inquiries and take as long as three years? Does he agree that in Committee it might be better to simplify the procedure so that it is quicker and easier?

Mr. Cartwright: I am in favour of simplification, but I would rather we had the simplified machinery tested in those areas that desperately need new development. The inner cities are obvious places for such an operation.

Part III relates to urban regeneration grants. The proposals are welcome so far as they go. We should do more, however, and use public money and investment as a lever to try to attract more private investment. That is a sensible step. The sums about which we are talking are extremely small. If we read the financial memorandum, we see that we are talking about £10 million to £20 million only in 1987-88. That is hardly a princely sum, given the tremendous problems in the inner cities. There is also concern, already expressed in the debate, that the funds may be made available at the expense of other parts of the urban programme. That would be indefensible.

I am also worried that, by making the grants direct to private enterprise and bypassing the local government machinery, we may have confusion and hostility between the local authority operating the urban programme and the Government operating the urban regeneration grants. We should be looking to the urban regeneration grants to complement the existing urban programme — working with local authorities and not competing with them. I hope that in Committee that point will be reconsidered.

Turning to part I of the Bill, on housing, I wish to deal first with the sale of council flats. I have the clear impression that the Government are sensitive to the criticism that the right to buy has been extremely successful where we all expected that it would be—in the semi-detached houses with gardens. They are the most desirable council properties. It has clearly been nothing like as successful with the sale of flats and maisonettes. Only 4 per cent. of the stock of flats has been sold. That inevitably produces a risk of polarisation—where those who have to depend on rented council housing are increasingly restricted to flats and maisonettes the less desirable property, which is often less well maintained.

I can understand the Government wanting to counter that criticism by seeking to sell more flats. I also understand their approach of increasing the discount and trying to deal with the problem of service charges. Some local authorities deliberately use the threat of massive service charges to deter people from buying. I have had cases in my constituency where tenants were officially quoted service charges of £3,000 a year for a rather unpleasant two-bedroom maisonette in beautiful downtown Plumstead. I recognise that as a problem.

I do not believe that the Bill will have a dramatic impact on the sale of flats and maisonettes. People will be reluctant to buy them, given a number of the issues which have been mentioned in the debate. First, there is the general environment of the average block of council flats or maisonettes. People will not invest their life savings in a maisonette in a block where the lifts are vandalised, where the entrance doors are smashed regularly, where the whole place is covered with graffiti and filth and where they cannot obtain the services for which they pay service charges. They will not buy properties which are in desperate need of renovation.

The Department of the Environment's own survey shows that about 85 per cent. of flats and maisonettes are in need of repair and renovation. The most important point is that people will not buy flats and maisonettes when they are well aware that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to sell them if they have to move because of the problem of selling one privately owned flat in a council block. I am interested in the idea of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) of dealing with the original valuation, but, with great respect, that will not have a dramatic effect.

Mr. Steen: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that all flats and maisonettes in inner-city areas, which are the most deprived areas, should have their weekly rental payments converted into a mortgage repayment, so that in 10 years the flat would belong to the tenant? Would that not be one of the most dramatic changes in our urban areas, which would turn public sector housing into private sector housing, and restore the pride of people in their area?

Mr. Cartwright: That idea has been touted around for some time, but it is simplistic. I do not know what would happen to the long-term unemployed on housing benefit, if they suddenly got the dubious advantage of owning a rundown maisonette in a council block with repair, maintenance and insurance problems. The problem is more complex than the hon. Gentleman suggests.

I wish to refer to the comment of the Building Employers Confederation, which clearly has an axe to grind, about ways of making flats and maisonettes more attractive for sale. It states:

> "Only if substantially more public resources are provided, specifically targetted to the renovation of flats, is the rate of sales of council flats likely to increase."

There is a good deal of common sense in that.

I am strongly in favour of the principle of devolving the management of council housing, and have been since my initial experience in local government about 20 years ago. This is not a party point, as some hon. Members in all parties are strongly in favour of the concept. We all understand the problems of centralised council management, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) referred to some of them. However concerned a council's members, and however skilled its housing staff, the system is inevitably insensitive to the needs of people as individuals. It is bureaucratic and slow-moving, especially when it must refer to committees for vital decisions. All hon. Members know of desperately needed homes standing empty for months because at least three council departments are involved — the housing department, the architect's department and the works

[Mr. Cartwright]

department. Then, because the property stands empty for so long, someone gets in and vandalises it, making the position worse. There is a desperate need for more local decentralised management.

The first possibility is to decentralise council management. That is certainly an improvement, but the management remains locked in to the central control systems of local authorities. Although that system sometimes involves tenant consultation, it does not give tenants genuine control over their estates. The second possibility, management co-operatives, is by far the best because it gives tenants genuine power and control over the running of their homes and their estate.

It is important to understand that that is not a panacea for all ills. First, tenants must want to participate in a co-operative, and understand what it involves. One cannot impose a co-operative on people who do not want one. A good deal of effort and investment is needed in explaining what it is about, and in providing detailed advice, back-up and guidance once the co-operative has been born. Some of us with a long record in the co-operative movement originally saw the Co-operative Development Agency as a way of developing the general advice and sponsorship of co-ops, but, sadly it has not been given the necessary resources.

The third possibility is trusts, which involve tenants and outside interests. As long ago as 1982 the SDP proposed neighbourhood housing trusts to take over existing council estates. It is essential that the trusts are democratically based and accountable downwards to the tenants whom they represent, not to some external force. The most interesting example of that is the Thamesmead development. With the abolition of the Greater London council, somebody had to take over that estate. I argued strongly to Ministers that any trust set up to do the job would have to be democratically accountable to the people. I pay all credit to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who listened to me and other local interests, and produced a model of local democracy. The model put to the people of Thamesmead gave them nine trust members elected by them, and three executives, who were to be appointed by the elected trust members and accountable to them. That is an important example of tenant and resident self-management.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is that not a perfect example of a local authority, the GLC, building an estate on which people want to live, and of people being completely satisfied with control being left in the hands of the GLC? The tenants of Thamesmead had a choice of two private trusts, but were never given the option that they wanted, which was to retain the GLC.

Mr. Cartwright: I would have to quarrel with some of that. I was not in favour of the abolition of the GLC, as the hon. Gentleman knows. But my Friday night advice surgeries would not bear out his point that everyone in Thamesmead was ecstatically happy with the GLC's management. *[Interruption.]* That was the implication of the hon. Gentleman's comment. He said that the residents would have preferred GLC management but they were not consulted about that. That is incorrect because the ballot gave the residents of Thamesmead three options — a community trust, which was finally adopted, a trust controlled by the London borough of Greenwich, which was rejected, or neither of the two. They opted for a genuine community trust by a clear majority. It is a sensible system of tenant and resident self-management, and I hope that we shall develop it in other areas.

We should not ignore some of the practical problems of development management. The first relates to the relationship with the local authority. There is little evidence yet that tenant co-operatives are cheaper. Many of them are locked into the central services of the local authority. We should also be worried about nomination rights. When a trust or co-op is set up, it inevitably runs the risk of becoming exclusive. It is important for it to keep its neighbourhood as it would like it. If no overall nomination right is held by the local authority, the management co-op may become inward-looking and selective in its acceptance of tenants. Similarly, there is a problem of mobility. I do not accept that there should be no right of exchange or of mobility for those involved in a housing co-operative. We need that right of mobility. I hope that we can deal with those practical problems in Committee.

The idea of complete privatisation of ownership also flows from the Bill. Our experience in that area is mainly limited to the refurbishment of former council property for sale. In some areas that has a considerable role to play, especially where there is a dearth of owner-occupation for young married couples wishing to buy for the first time. Otherwise, we risk forcing young couples away from inner-city areas, which only aggravates the problems there. But equally, in many stress areas there is a continuing need for rented housing. When the private sector takes over the ownership of council estates, one is bound to ask whether it will be interested in letting those properties. Will the private sector get a sensible, adequate return, in its terms, on the capital investment involved in the purchase and rehabilitation of the estates? At the end of last year, the building societies were apparently warning the Government that rent control would have to be abolished if it were to make financial sense for them to take over a tenanted council estate and continue to provide rented housing. There must be a risk that the Bill will simply aggravate the demand for what council property remains.

I want to refer to the issue of consultation with tenants when their estates and homes are privatised. Experience until now has been chequered. In some cases consultation has been limited and in others it has been non-existent. I resent homes being sold over the heads of people living in them. I suggest that there is a contrast with what the Government are doing in the Local Government Bill, where they require councils not to dispose of mortgages without consulting those who are hold them and paying mortgage bills. Ministers were indignant about the idea of councils selling mortgages over the heads of those who hold them. That may be a serious issue. I have no strong views about it but it is a much more serious issue to be selling homes over the heads of tenants without any involvement on their part.

Clause 5 massively undermines the rights of tenants. The idea that councils would have the power to remove tenants from their homes so that whole estates could be sold with vacant possession is going too far. Under the existing arrangements, there are serious problems about decanting whole estates. Sometimes it has to be done where there are major problems but it does cause

difficulties especially if one is trying to build up a community feeling. Suddenly to empty the whole area causes major upheavel and considerable hardship to individuals. However, in such cases tenants at least have some ability to bargain. They can hold out until they get an offer of rehousing which suits them.

My fear about the new arrangements under clause 5 is that that bargaining power of tenants will be substantially reduced. All they must have is one suitable alternative offer. Those of us who are used to housing problems all know that an alternative offer may look good on paper but in reality it may not be at all acceptable to the tenant concerned. The risk is that the tenants have no choice but to accept the alternative housing offered or make themselves homeless, with all that flows from that. That is an appalling way to treat people. It looks as if we are simply regarding tenants as numbers occupying units of accommodation rather than as flesh and blood people living in their own homes. I hope that clause will be changed dramatically in Committee.

The issue of management agreements for managing council property in clause 6 goes well beyond devolving power to housing co-operatives, housing associations, tenant-based trusts and other such bodies. It opens the door to private management agencies which might be prepared to take on the management of council property in the hope of making a profit. In that situation, what protection is there for the tenant?

As far as I can see in the Bill, the one protection the tenant gets is the right to buy. That is maintained for him, but what is the position of the tenant in relation to many other issues laid down, for example, in the tenants charter? What is the position on repairs, allocations policy, enforcement of tenancy, and the fixing of rent levels? What power does the tenant have to go to his local councillor when the management has been devolved to a private agency? Presumably, the council having given a management agreement to a private agency, local councillors will have no chance to pursue the roles which we all know to be their bread and butter in terms of housing management. That is also something we should look at in more detail in Committee.

I think that the Bill has some useful proposals, some of which I welcome. However, I strongly endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Perry Barr, who, in his reasoned amendment, says that this is a missed opportunity. The Bill could have provided real practical help for tenants' co-operatives and tenant-based trusts. It could have been a real boost for self-management in housing. As drafted, the Bill is motivated by a belief in traditional privatisation and an attempt to revive the private rented sector in a new guise. For that reason, we shall vote against it.

6.4 pm

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): It is self-evident that the provision of housing and planning land use are two vital political issues. Anyone who has listened to the debate so far will appreciate that those issues cause deep and bitter controversy. I think we are entitled to point out to our constituents that we hold totally different views in many respects but they are all sincerely held. I do not doubt the sincerity of the Opposition Members who have spoken.

However, there are one or two ill effects of this political divide. The first is that the incompatibility between our different political views has led to a certain unnecessary polarisation. There is a lack of consensus which is damaging to long-term planning for the provision of housing. It is also damaging to the necessary long-term planning to tackle the problems of inner cities and to promote urban regeneration. The second ill effect of the polarisation is that it has inhibited the best, and some of us would say the only, key to tackle the problems—greater co-operation and co-ordination between the public and private sectors.

I would like to give some statistics to underline that. The urban housing renewal unit of the Department of the Environment has estimated that we need to spend about £18,800 million if we are to renovate and refurbish the public sector part of housing alone. I treat macro figures with some reserve, but I have heard it estimated that we would need to spend about £45,000 million to put our national housing stock in good repair. I do not think that there is the remotest possibility of the public sector satisfactorily and successfully being able to tackle that problem. Even if we could significantly increase public sector funding, it would not achieve that objective. I apologise for the partiality but I believe that it is true that if we significantly increased public expenditure on housing it would lead to inflation and we would move along the old, well-worn spiral of needing to spend more and more to achieve less and less.

I believe that the public sector and the private sector should work more harmoniously. I suggest to the House that the

"public sector has the authority and I think the public acceptance. It has the contact with communities and can identify the social needs of a particular area. It often owns the land that needs to be redeveloped. The private sector has the access to finance, the development experience and the skills and expertise needed to assemble parcels of land and undertake construction." — [*Official Report*, 20 December 1985; Vol. 89, c. 712.]

The key to success will be the marriage of those two sectors. I believe that the Bill is important and that it moves in the right direction.

I particularly welcome five points in the Bill. I welcome the further discounts and incentives to encourage council tenants to buy their own homes by increasing discounts by 10 per cent., so that they range from 42 per cent. to 70 per cent., as contained in clause 1. The merits of that have been eloquently testified to by my hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). I welcome the encouragement to set up management trusts to encourage residents to run their own blocks of flats. I listened sympathetically to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) when he spoke about that matter. I believe that we have now gained sufficient experience from the many experiments that have taken place. However, in many instances there is still what I would call trivial consultation by local authorities with their tenants, and not the genuine joint decision-making that we need to encourage. I believe that clauses 6 and 7 move those initiatives in the right direction.

However much this displeases the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), I must point out that the amendment to the Bill is the same predictable, depressing knee-jerk reaction that we have come to expect from the Opposition, but I agree with him on one or two of his points. The Committee will have to look carefully into how clause 5 is to be operated, as both he and the hon. Member for Woolwich said, to protect tenants from unnecessarily being moved out of their homes. We must

[Mr. Sydney Chapman]

look at this in a balanced way. It ill becomes people who have promoted wholesale redevelopment schemes in the past to pick up this point and pretend that there is some inconsistency in principle. Whether it is compulsory redevelopment, compulsory acquisition or moving people out of their council homes, the Government must carry out such measures only as a last resort.

I welcome the introduction of an urban regeneration grant. My hon. Friend the Minister will recall that I had an Adjournment debate on 20 December on the need to encourage urban regeneration, and this was one of the points that I put to him. I suspect that other organisations and people must have made this point to him, because I cannot believe that he has necessarily taken notice of my point of view. However, I welcome clause 11. I understand, and fervently hope, that it is to be a complement to the urban development grant and not a substitute for it. It is a modest initiative on its introduction —some £10 million to £20 million—but one of the disincentives of the urban development grant is that it requires a 25 per cent. input from the local authority. I welcome this as another positive initiative.

Anybody who thinks that the urban regeneration grants are a giveaway bonanza to developers should remember that such grants require £5 of investment by the developer to attract £1 of grant from the Government, as a sign of good faith. As I said on 20 December, public funding in these sectors can attract three or four times as much private investment. In the London Docklands development Corporation area, £180 million of Government money has attracted no less than £1,000 million of private investment. The ratio will undoubtedly be lower in other areas, but such a movement is to be encouraged. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will keep this under review and that the money will be forthcoming if, as I believe, the urban regeneration grant proves to be successful.

At this stage, I prudently declare that I am a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects and a fellow of the Royal Town Planning Institute, although a non-practising architect and planner. I am also a non-executive director of a development company and a construction company.

I welcome the introduction of the simplified planning zone which will specify types of development in specified areas not requiring planning permission. Therefore, I welcome clauses 9 and 10 and schedule 3.

I also welcome the Bill because, as laid down in part IV and schedule 4, it has the objective of securing better control over the handling of hazardous substances. These are sensible policies.

It will come as no surprise to anybody that we all have our own views and minor criticisms, although they are significant points, to make about any major Bill, especially one of this length. While I realise that some of these points may be better handled in Committee, it is only fair to my right hon. and hon. Friends to put down a marker by mentioning specifically two aspects of the Bill that worry me. The first comes in the simplified planning zone provisions. The hon. Member for Perry Barr has a point when he makes out the case that these areas, after due consultation with local authorities, might be designated, like an enterprise zone, directly by the Government. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) that the process of designating a simplified planning zone is somewhat long and complicated and could, as he said, involve up to two public inquiries. This process is too long, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to look at this point carefully.

One aspect of the proposed simplified planning zone procedure is causing concern to environmental bodies. I mention the English Heritage, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Georgian Group, the Victorian Society and the Civic Trust, all of which are deeply anxious that simplified planning zones should not be designated in any part of a conservation area. I hope to press that point if I have the privilege of serving on the Committee. I do not believe that the Government would want to do this in any case, but they could give a reassurance that is badly needed.

My second point of criticism is about listed buildings. As my right hon. and hon. Friends will know, anybody wanting to demolish a listed building has to refer the application not only to the local planning authority but at least to the regional office of the Department of the Environment, and probably from there to the Secretary of State himself. As I understand the Bill, this provision is to be removed. I understand that the Secretary of State has it in mind that he would activate this provision in the Bill only for a partial demolition of a grade 2 listed building. That would reassure me, but it would reassure me more if it were actually written into the Bill and I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will sympathetically consider that point.

The Bill can be criticised, as it has been, for not doing exactly what Government critics believe is their answer for housing and planning policies, or alternatively not going enough in the direction some Government supporters think that it should. I shall add my pennyworth, although I may not be popular for doing so. I should have liked to have seen in the Bill greater financial resources to be allocated to the renovation of properties, in particular council flats, because it is essential to encourage more tenants to buy and that would be helpful in achieving that objective.

I return to the hoary chestnut. There are plenty of resources locked up by Government in the capital receipts of local authorities, and the Government must look at this sympathetically. Nevertheless, the provisions of the Bill move the Government steadily and surely in the direction that they believe to be right in tackling the task of urban regeneration. I share those sentiments, and I believe that the Bill should be warmly welcomed for two reasons. The first is that it encourages private investment, which will have a beneficial spin-off effect for public provision of housing—let no one underestimate that. Secondly, it makes the development control system less inflexible, and gives the opportunity for the planning system to take on a more positive role. For those two reasons, but not for those reasons alone, I warmly welcome the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next Back Bench speaker, I point out that 10 hon. Members on each side of the House—that is 20 in all—have expressed their wish to take part in the debate. I ask hon. Members to bear that fact in mind.

6.29 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I shall try to make all of my points as quickly as possible and not speak for too long. However, there are one or two matters I wish to raise in response to the debate so far.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman), who is an architect and whose professional judgment, I respect. We both serve on the Environment Select Committee and I recognise his professional judgment although I disagree politically with much of what he advocates. I cannot be here for the whole debate because I and my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench have a meeting later with the Royal Institute of British Architects. It is appropriate to mention that since I follow the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet who is an architect.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) refused to give way when he was reading from the 1983 Labour party manifesto in respect of our policy on the sale of council houses. The hon. Member was quite correct when he said that the Labour party was in favour, at the last election, of taking away the right to buy. That did not mean that we intended to stop councils which wished to sell council houses from doing so. The Labour party intended to give freedom back to local authorities to continue the sale of council houses if they wished. If they did not wish to do so, the policy was exactly the same as—

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Liberal policy.

Mr. Roberts: Yes. As the hon. Member points out from a sedentary position, it was the same as Liberal and Social Democratic party policy. The Labour party did not intend—as Conservative canvassers and, I might say, alliance canvassers said on the doorsteps at the last election—compulsorily to purchase or to give the power of compulsory purchase to local authorities to take council houses away from people who had brought them. There was never any suggestion of that, although that was the lie told by opposing canvassers on the doorsteps at the last election. It has never been our policy.

Many former council tenants, who have purchased their houses in my constituency, would love Sefton council, or any other council, to have the option to buy their houses back at market value, because they cannot sell them. They have failed to sell them on the open market and see no harm in the council having the first option to purchase them back at market value. I see no harm in that either.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne does not quote from "Homes for the Future", the Labour party's current policy statement on the sale of council houses. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is not trying to force the Labour party to alter everything but he has succeeded in getting the Labour party conference overwhelmingly to accept the current policy in every detail. The Bill deals with the situation created by seven years of Conservative housing policy. The policies of the next Labour Government will also have to address that problem.

When the Labour party comes to power—perhaps in the next 18 months or two years—it will face a housing crisis of 1945 proportions, with massively growing waiting lists, increasing homelessness and a deterioration of the housing stock. I believe in choice, but the Tory choice in the sale of council houses has been choice at the cost of other people's choice. We predicted that if the Government forced the sale of council houses in 1979, only the best houses would be sold and councils would be left with the worst of the housing stock. We predicted that public sector housing would become stigmatised and ghetto housing estates similar to American welfare housing would develop. The Government are introducing the Bill because that has happened. The Labour party's prediction that only the best houses would be sold has come true. No one wants to buy flats and the Government are attempting to deal with the fact that only 4 per cent. of sales are flats, which represents only one third of the total housing stock.

Mr. Winnick: It was not only the Labour party that predicted what would happen. In 1980, the Select Committee on the Environment, with a Tory majority, said, understandably, that only the best type of accommodation would be sold.

Mr. Roberts: That is exactly what has happened. The Bill is the Government's closing-down sale. Every year, especially when the Government are near local elections, they up the discount to 30 per cent., 50 per cent. or 60 per cent. Now, with the closing-down sale, it is 70 per cent. It is an attempt to make the figures look better than they are and to get more and more sales as they approach a general election. As my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr has said, it will not work. Do Ministers and Conservative Members honestly believe that a 70 per cent. discount, with a relaxation of service charges for five years, will encourage people to buy deck access, high-rise, inadequate and difficult-to-let flats? If they do, they are living in cloud-cuckoo-land. Families in those flats do not wish to buy them and 90 per cent. of them do not wish to rent them either.

The families want to be transferred into decent houses — the houses which the Government have allowed councils to sell off. New houses are not being built. People are stuck in flats they want to leave, and most certainly do not want to buy.

I know what the flats are like. There are some blocks which have been emptied, sold off to developers, done up and sold again, but there are many more that developers would not touch with a barge pole. I remember the first thing that happened to me when I became chairman of housing in the city of Manchester. The director of housing came to me and said, "We have had a telephone call to the housing department from a woman who says a donkey keeps going past her bedroom window." I replied, "What is wrong with that?" The director of housing said, "She lives on the eighth floor." I asked what he had done about that. He said, "We have rung up the social services department and they are sending a mental health visitor round." I then asked what happened and was told, "The mental health visitor went round and was interviewing the woman and a donkey went past the window." They then found out that the guy at the end of the deck was keeping a donkey in the front room and at night he was bedding it down in the well of the lift shaft. That is the type of problem experienced in these deck access flats. I asked the director of housing, "What have you done about this?" He replied, "We have got the woman a transfer and the donkey is quite happy." With problems like that and in those types of flats, people will not buy no matter how much the discount is put up.

[Mr. Roberts]

The Labour party has opposed the policy of selling off all of the best housing and leaving local authorities with the worst. There is nothing inconsistent in the Labour party policy. There is no point in continuing to sell off what has already been sold. The Labour party has to address itself to how best to help the people we predicted would suffer if the best housing was sold off—the people left in the worst housing, the families in flats. In "Homes for the Future" we propose to keep the right to buy, but we will introduce another set of policies that will deal adequately with all of the criticisms of the Government's sales policy. That will justify our opposition to their sales policy from 1980.

We shall help people living in flats, especially with families, not by paltry measures such as are put forward in the Bill, but by giving them right-to-buy grants which will enable them to leave their flats and become owner-occupiers in the private market. The precedent has already been set by the Government in their policy towards tenants of charitable housing associations. We will help the families imprisoned in flats whom we predicted would be left in the worst housing.

We opposed the sale of council housing because it diminished the stock and because there would be no relets. The Labour party will stick by the right to buy, but will say that for every council house sold by councils, including Tory councils, they will have to build a new one to replace it. What is wrong with that?

In the early days, the Tory argument, in preparing the ground for the sale of council houses, was that sales would generate money to build more houses for rent. Of course, the Government have forgotten that, except when they are remipded by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet. That is what capital receipts were supposed to be for. The Labour party will ensure that every house which is sold is replaced. If people have the right to buy, what is wrong with their having the right to rent? Why cannot people on council house waiting lists have the right to require a local authority to buy a house on the open market and rent it to them if it does not have enough houses of its own? What is wrong with the right to sell? Why cannot elderly owner-occupiers have the right to require the local authority to buy their houses so that they become council tenants, especially when they cannot afford repairs?

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): The hon. Gentleman has rightly described a basic tenet of housing policy—the right to freedom of choice. Will he consider another right — the right to rent private accommodation?

Mr. Roberts: I am in favour of people owning their own homes. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is. I am in favour of people owning their own homes as owner-occupiers, collectively through social ownership, co-operatives and housing associations and local authority home ownership. I oppose people owning other people's homes and making profit out of them. The hon. Member means the right to make profit out of housing. I oppose that.

As is outlined in "Homes for the Future", I favour tenants having the right to buy off private landlords. They should also have the right to enforce improvements. The worst housed people with fewest amenities and fewest repairs, are in the private rented sector. They must be given some rights as well. What is wrong with their being able to acquire their property?

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): The hon. Gentleman says that he does not favour the private sector producing rented accommodation when it makes a profit. Does he agree that he wants to place responsibility for providing rented accommodation squarely on the state, and that there should be no private sector participation? Does he agree that that is the logical conclusion of his argument?

Mr. Roberts: I am against the state providing everything. I am in favour of democratically elected local government providing it, of co-operatives providing it and of housing associations providing it. Does the hon. Gentleman remember housing associations? They used to be the respectable wing of the public rented sector for Conservatives. Many a housing association management committee comprised people who would be at home on the management committee of a Conservative party constituency association, but then the Government started to attack them, cut their expenditure, restricted what they could do and thus stopped them providing housing for rent. Nobody is saying that landlords who rent off a room or a flat in their own home should be prevented from doing so, but tenants of absentee landlords should be given the right to buy.

I hope that the urgings of the hon. Member for Eastbourne will be taken up by the Minister because that would ensure our winning the next general election. The hon. Gentleman wants another Rent Act 1957. He wants to destroy security of tenure in the private rented sector. I imagine that the people of Fulham who live in the private rented sector will be listening to that. Does the House remember the 1957 Act—the Rachman Act? I thought that the Government had already solved the problem with shorthold tenancy agreements—the one that would bring all of the property into the private rented sector market because the landlord could get tenants out easily. What has happened to the assured tenancies in the Housing Act 1980 which enables builders to build back-to-back houses and let them free from Rent Act restrictions? I have not noticed a flood of such property revitalising the private rented sector and meeting housing needs.

The Bill does nothing to deal with the real problem of resources, of which there is a massive shortage. It does nothing to tackle the public expenditure needed to build, modernise and improve houses, especially in inner cities. When, in October 1981, he was Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said at the Conservative party conference that the principle of self-help was not applicable to inner city problems, that Tories must realise the true impact of unemployment

"if the case can be made it may also be from extra public expenditure"

that they have to solve these problems.

The House should listen to this as the right hon. Gentleman might not be able to speak at the next Tory party conference. He continued:

"In the inner cities, none of us can act on a scale and with a speed that has the measure of the present recession".

He was right then and still is in the context of the Bill. We have only to consider the capital allocations of local authorities such as Sefton to see how inadequate is the money that the Government have provided for housing.

Sefton is a Tory-controlled council and, as I have said so many times before, it is at the bidding of the Government. It cuts everything that the Government ask it to cut and it keeps within Government guidelines. This year they asked for a restrained bid for 1987-88 of £19·5 million. The Labour party proposed a bid of £35 million because that is what we thought we needed and could spend to start tackling the borough's housing problems.

Sefton received only £5·93 million. That is all. It is a housing manager's pocket money, and most of it is already committed. It depends for any continuing or new capital activity in the next financial year on capital receipts of £3·5 million and on £2·25 million from an urban programme. It will not be able to build any houses—it wanted to build only 107 sheltered houses and 90 for general needs, but it cannot. It wanted £5·5 million to provide improvement grants for owner-occupiers, but got only £1·1 million. It wanted to give housing associations £1·5 million to build special needs housing, but it got only £250,000. I could go on describing how the problems of my area are affected by the Government's refusal to provide the necessary money. There are 2,381 difficult-to-let houses in my constituency and 4,000 people on what the Government call the active waiting list.

It has been implied today that the Government are likely to announce proposals concerning inner-city policies. It seems to be being suggested that the task force concept will be extended to other cities. If so, and if it is anything like the task force in Merseyside, other inner-city areas will not get very much. The task force on Merseyside has operated merely as a sub-office of the Department of the Environment office in Manchester. It has funded some urban aid projects which would otherwise have been funded with the same urban aid money through the local authority.

The proposed special planning zones are modelled on enterprise zones. They too have been a failure. Ministers should go to Speke and have a look. Retail trades, which do not employ many people, have gone in to take advantage of low rates and no planning restrictions. There is no manufacturing, but bonded warehouses which employ very few people have moved from docklands in my constituency to the enterprise zone for the simple reason that they do not have to pay rates there. The concept of enterprise zones and the lack of planning, as is proposed in the special planning zones, does not work.

I predicted some time ago that if the Government got a third term of office, they would set about destroying the planning system as we know it because they do not like planning. Green belt areas and rural seats would be affected. I did not think that they would start before the next general election, but they have here. They have set about destroying planning so that we shall have many Hong Kongs scattered through our inner cities.

Mr. Steen: It would do no harm.

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman can have one in his constituency. He should go down to Devon and tell his constituents that he wants such developments there. We do not want them in Bootle. The trouble is that we are more likely to get them in Bootle because the destruction of planning is dear to the heart of the council in the area that I represent. I hope that the very reasonable reasoned amendment which the Opposition have tabled will be carried.

6.40 pm

Mr. John Heddle (Mid-Staffordshire): I will adhere to your instruction to be brief, Mr. Speaker, and in the course of five or six minutes will make five points which no other right hon. or hon. Member has made so far.

I yearn for the day when the House can debate housing on a non-partisan basis. I believe that today's debate has taken us a small step in that direction. I respect the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) for having said, not just in the Chamber today but publicly elsewhere, that he and other Labour Members genuinely believe that, deep in their hearts and minds, most people want to be masters of their own destinies, control their environment, own their own homes, and pass on the fruits of their life's labours to their children. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on that and I hope that he can take other Labour Members with him. That can only be to the benefit and independence of our nation in years to come. The nation will not then have to depend upon people living in an impersonal concrete block with a donkey as a neighbour.

I must declare two interests. I am a vice-president of the Building Societies Association and, as a former practising surveyor and valuer before I was elected, I am now a consultant to a practice which may well have clients who might benefit from the urban regeneration grants if the Bill is passed.

In a spirit of trying to find the consensus to which I have referred, I would like wholeheartedly to endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) about giving people the right to rent. The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) also made that point. Everyone should have the right to a roof over their heads. If they cannot afford the rent themselves for one reason or another, they should have the benefit that the state or another agency can provide for them, to keep them wind and watertight and safe from destitution.

Will the shadow Minister for Housing, the hon. Member for Perry Barr, tell us, now or in the near future, why it will not include a provision in its next manifesto to repeal the shorthold provisions of the Housing Act 1980? I genuinely believe that one of the reasons why the private sector is not prepared to provide homes to let on a shorthold basis is the threat that, with the inevitable swing of the political pendulum early in the 21st century or beyond, another party in power might repeal the shorthold provisions.

I would gladly give way to the hon. Member for Perry Barr if he would admit from the Dispatch Box that he agrees with me and that, in the interests of giving people the right to rent by shorthold tenancy, the Labour party will not repeal the shorthold provisions of the Housing Act 1980.

Mr. Rooker: The policy of the Labour party is that we will repeal such legislation. That remains the case and there need be no doubt in anyone's mind about that.

Mr. Heddle: The hon. Member is disagreeing with his colleague the hon. Member for Bootle, who has just said that the shorthold provisions are not working. I ask the hon. Member for Perry Barr once more: if the shorthold provisions are not working, is that not because of the commitment that he has just given from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Rooker: That is probably true.

Mr. Heddle: I hope that the hon. Member for Perry Barr will give the matter a second thought. The House and the nation will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has just said.

My second point is that every hon. Member at his advice bureau on Fridays and Saturdays hears sad cases of people desperately looking for homes, who know of homes down their streets, in their cul-de-sacs, which have been empty not for one month, two months or six months but sometimes for a year or more.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will give consideration to requiring local authorities to give reasons in their regular returns to his Department why such houses have remained empty for three, six, nine and 12 months or more. Perhaps a local authority which did not have a genuine will to rehabilitate, repair and improve should be encouraged by the Department to allow tenants on the waiting list to have the key and a rent-free period to renovate those properties at their own expense. That would save the ratepayer, the taxpayer and the Chancellor of the Exchequer the responsibility for doing so.

Most council tenants and potential council tenants are do-it-yourself experts. They would willingly put in a new bathroom and redecorate the property themselves in exchange for a rent-free period. They would have a home, the home would then be occupied and the taxpayer and ratepayer would save money.

My third point relates to council house rent arrears. Last year, those arrears were £187 million, a rise of £11 million over the year before. This year that figure is likely to exceed £200 million. The lack of that money prevents local authorities from providing, building, improving, modernising and extending their housing stock.

Where has the rent collector gone? What has happened to the person who knocked on the door every Monday or Tuesday, twice a fornight, three times a month to remind the tenant that if he wanted a roof over his head he ought to pay the rent and that if he could not pay the rent there was another agency, the Department of Health and Social Security, which was prepared to help deserving cases? In such circumstances, the local authority can look to the DHSS for the payment of that money, thus relieving the tenant of the worry of that never-ending spiral of debt which the tenant never intended to get into in the first place but from which he does not have the courage or understanding to extricate himself.

My fourth point is that the urban regeneration funding should be complementary and additional to the existing urban programme and not part of the existing budget, which I suspect it is. That should not displace the existing efforts that are being made by local authorities.

My final point concerns vacant land and vacant land registers. At long last, my right hon. Friend is speeding up the process of requiring local authorities, other statutory undertakers and public bodies to bring forward land which has been locked away from public view behind corrugated iron and gorse bushes for years. That land is at last coming on the market through the exercise of section 98 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. Why are those registers restricted to sites of more than one acre? Why is not every parcel of land, of a quarter or half an acre, included? Such parcels of land are often large enough to build a small cul-de-sac on or perhaps large enough to accommodate a little enclave of mobile homes to provide temporary accommodation for people who are tonight homeless in the constituency of the hon. Member for Perry Barr—who is laughing.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Heddle: Mobile homes provide a very adequate means of accommodation for those people who are living under the arches, and who cannot enjoy the right to rent.

Mr. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heddle: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He has intervened already and will no doubt catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Steen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heddle: I apologise to my hon. Friend for not giving way, but he may wish to take up my points in his own speech.

In conclusion—I said I would speak for only a few minutes—I believe that the Bill is a good Bill. It is good for the tenant who wants to buy, and it is good for the tenant who cannot buy. It could be good for the building societies movement if building societies are given the opportunity in the Building Societies Bill, which is now in Committee, to invest directly in ready-made investments. They could buy the hard-to-let blocks of flats from local authorities.

I do not share the view of some colleagues that, by increasing the level of discount to 70 per cent. and reducing the qualifying period from three years to two years—I welcome that move to some extent—sales will be stimulated. I do not believe that sales of high-rise council flats will be stimulated. By and large, those flats are inferior architecturally and environmentally. Their construction is usually inferior. Often, the tenants are on low incomes and, in some cases, it would not be in their best interests to buy. I would prefer the management of those blocks to be put out to more sympathetic, non-profit-making organisations, such as the building societies. The Building Societies Bill will enable building societies to do that.

The Bill will be a good measure for all those estates that are grafitti-ridden and worse. It will be good for our inner cities and, therefore, for the heart of our nation.

6.50 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I do not know why the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) concluded that there is consensus here on the legislation. There is nothing of the kind, as has already been demonstrated by my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker).

We face a formidable housing crisis. New public sector starts are at their lowest level in peace time. It is unlikely that the total number of building starts in the public sector in the whole of the United Kingdom this year will be more than 30,000. That means that a large number of people are unable to buy, and stand no chance in the near future of being offered, accommodation by a council. That all adds to the housing crisis.

Last year was the centenary of the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1885; so we have had 100 years of council housing.

Mr. Steen: It was a disaster.

Mr. Winnick: It was not, however, an anniversary that the Government would wish to see celebrated. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said in an intervention, council housing came about because of slum landlords, and so on. Although the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) said that council housing had been a disaster, I take a different view. Hundreds of thousands of people of successive generations have benefited from public sector housing, and we shall not apologise for that in any way, shape, or form.

The purpose of the Bill is to reduce substantially the amount of rented accommodation in the public sector and actively to encourage privatisation of council estates. That would undoubtedly seriously undermine the rights and security of those tenants who do not wish to buy. A large number of tenants, of course, have no intention of buying. Under the proposed legislation, some of the accommodation will be transferred to private ownership. Conservative Members talk about tenants' rights and so on; but what about the tenants? They will have no say. They will not even be consulted, so let us not have hypocrisy about tenants' rights. We should be concerned about the way in which those rights will be undermined.

Since the Conservative party took office, public expenditure on housing has been cut by two thirds. The housing investment programme allocation continues to be totally inadequate to meet the needs of local authorities in building and modernising. Since 1979, because of the Government's policies, and for no other reason, no council house starts have taken place in my borough of Walsall. What am I supposed to say to the people with children who come to me at my surgeries or write to me asking for accommodation or a transfer from a high-rise flat to a house? Should I say that they should buy? Many are unemployed and the incomes of others are totally inadequate to obtain a mortgage. Their plight is due to the Government's deliberate policy of making it virtually impossible for local authorities, such as mine, to undertake any new building work.

Owner-occupiers in my constituency in need of improvement grants are regular visitors to my surgeries. They are in no position to pay for a new roof, roof repairs or other repair work without assistance. Once the 1983 election was won, the Government turned off improvement grants so that it became virtually impossible in many parts of the country—certainly in my area—to obtain such grants. Is there any protest from Conservative Members who are always talking about owner-occupiers? What about those owner-occupiers I have described—do they not have a right? Many are retired and desperately need improvements on their properties which can be carried out only through a grant. There is no help in the Bill.

We must bear in mind that the demand for rented accommodation continues to grow. It is not obscene that, when thousands of families are forced to live in and bring up children in bed and breakfast accommodation, legislation is brought before us that does nothing to build a single new council house or flat? This will affect not only people in bed and breakfast accommodation who are homeless, but many others.

The fallacy in the Government's case is the argument that most people, apart from the pensioners and the poorest people, can afford to buy. Is it possible in Greater London to find even a one-bedroomed flat for less than £26,000 or £30,000? The position is somewhat different in the west midlands. House prices exclude many people, not just the poorest, from being able to buy. What is to happen to them? Should they be denied adequate housing? Should they continue to wait for years on council waiting lists because of the Government's deliberate policy of ensuring by financial means that local authorities cannot build? Apart from the large number of people who are not offered any type of accommodation, many other people, such as my constituents, have to wait a very long time for transfer to a house. Even if they have two children and live in a high-rise block of flats, they must wait years on end before there is any chance that the council can offer them a house. Is it asking too much to provide for them what we as Members of Parliament have—a house with a garden? They are asking only for that. Inevitably they are told by the local neighbourhood offices who certainly want to help, "You must wait." To have two children is not a good enough reason.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winnick: Because of the shortage of time, I shall not.

It is interesting that the Government have continued to deny private tenants any opportunity to buy. We have asked a simple question: if it is almost a "sacred" right for council tenants to buy, as Conservative Members have argued, why not give private tenants the same right? Why not give that right to the tenants in the constituency of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), who complained to the local press? Why should private tenants, who in many cases—I would not say in all cases—are in a worse position than council tenants, not have a legal right to buy? When I asked the former Minister, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), that question, he ruled the idea out entirely. I am willing to give way to the Minister for Housing to enable him to answer this question: why should private tenants not have the legal right to buy? It is understandable that there is silence because there is no real answer to the question. It is obvious that the Tory party is not in power to offend its friends in property companies and the large landlords.

Many council tenants face a serious threat as a result of the Bill's introduction. Clause 5 will make it much easier for a council tenant to lose his or her security and for possession to be granted against the tenant when the local authority wishes to sell the accommodation to the private sector. We are told that there is provision in the Bill for suitable alternative accommodation to be found, but who decides whether the alternative accommodation is suitable? Will it be the courts or local authorities which decide? Council tenants will have no effective defence against eviction under the Bill. If the local authority decides to sell and the Secretary of State agrees, that is the end of the matter.

It is understandable that many private landlords and property companies would like to see the same powers given to them. The hon. Members for Eastbourne and for Mid-Staffordshire argued, in effect, for a repeat of the Rent Act 1957. My hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) was right to make the assertion that he did. I was a member of a local authority when that Act started to take effect. The authority's job was to do its best to rehouse those who had been evicted legally—not by Rachmanite means—as a result of the Act.

When the Labour party won the 1964 general election the 1957 Act was so discredited—perhaps the Labour

[Mr. Winnick]

party won the election because of the Act—that the then Tory Opposition did not vote against the Labour Bill to repeal the measure which they had introduced a few years previously. I believe that the Cabinet takes the same line as the hon. Members for Eastbourne and for Mid-Staffordshire. The members of the Cabinet would like to see the deregulation of the private rented sector but they do not have the courage to take the steps to secure that result. They believe—they are right to do so—that if there is one certain way to ensure that the Labour party wins the next general election, it is to deregulate the private rented sector. I believe that my party will win in any event.

Mr. Heddle: The hon. Gentleman takes us down memory lane to the 1957 Act in every housing debate. I would rather look forward to 1997, when I hope that there will be more people in homes and more people having the right to rent. Does he agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) that in any new letting of any property having basic, standard amenities, such as a bathroom, hot water and electricity—a property which has been fully modernised and improved — in circumstances where the landlord and the tenant can come to terms on the rent that should pass between them in return for the right to rent, the result will be the provision of more accommodation for his constituents and mine? If so, will he tell the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench?

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman seems not to understand that the 1957 Act — I have gone down memory lane, and rightly so, for reasons which my right hon. and hon. Friends and even some Conservative Members will understand—demonstrated that deregulation does not provide more accommodation. More privately rented accommodation was lost as a result of that Act than ever before. When landlords were given the opportunity of obtaining vacant possession, they sold off their properties. We must recognise—the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire is unwilling to do so—that if we accept that there is a need for rented accommodation, the supply of it will come only from the public sector. Unfortunately, some Conservative Members do not seem to recognise the need for rented accommodation.

The Select Committee on the Environment heard evidence from representatives of the private sector and they made it clear that they were not interested in shortholds. The Small Landlords Association and other such groups told the Committee that it would not work. In their opinion, it would not give them the proper freedom to operate. The sort of freedom that they wanted was available under the 1957 Act. Unless they are given that freedom, we shall see no revival of the private rented sector.

Clause 6 encourages councils to hive off their housing management to private agencies. As long as the agents are approved by the Secretary of State, there will be no further obstacles to such an arrangement. The agents can take over the management of council estates and they are not likely to be overconcerned with tenants' rights and tenants' problems. As I understand it, these agents will be responsible for the allocation of council housing and the level of rents. It seems that they will be responsible for all matters concerned with housing management.

I am totally opposed to that approach. I believe that local authorities should continue to be responsible for housing management. That responsibility should not be given to the private sector. I am proud that the borough in my constituency pioneered local neighbourhood offices. The concept was sneered at at the time, and it was argued that it would not work. It has 32 offices and it is interesting that a number of local authorities, including non-Labour ones, are copying what was initiated in 1980 in Walsall. That is a form of decentralisation that should be encouraged. Although these neighbourhood offices have been subjected to all sorts of difficulty and stress — understandably so in view of the Government's policy— they have proved essential in securing good management practice. There is no need to privatise such functions.

The Bill makes no provision for tenants to have any say in whether their homes are to be sold to the private sector or whether management functions are to be taken over by a private agency. Tenants will have no right of information. They will merely be told what has been done. For all these reasons we must be very much opposed to clauses 5 and 6.

The Government are determined to treat the public housing sector with contempt. They are waging what can be described only as a doctrinaire vendetta against council housing. Ministers remain indifferent to the housing plight and misery of so many of our fellow citizens. The Cabinet has shown by the introduction of the Bill that it is interested only in trying substantially to reduce the number of rented dwellings.

The Opposition are concerned to ensure that people are in the position to buy their own homes, and in the 1960s a Labour Government made it easier for many to obtain a mortgage under the option mortgage scheme. We are determined to ensure—it is one of the reasons why we are here — that those who cannot buy are housed adequately. They should have decent council housing and we shall do our utmost to expose their present plight. When we are in government, we shall ensure that policies are implemented that will result in such people being housed adequately.

7.8 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I make no bones about believing that housing policy should be judged according to the criterion of how it measures up to the aspirations of the British people. There can be no doubt that the majority of the people prefer owner-occupation; that is especially true of those who form the youngest age group who are in a position to buy their own homes. I shall judge the Bill according to that criterion and accordingly I shall welcome it. Unfortunately, it does not go as far as I would like by the same criterion.

Unlike many other Conservative Members, I accept the case for the right to buy for the tenants of private institutional organisations. I hope that that view will shortly become the view of many more of my colleagues, and in due course the view of those who occupy the Government Front Bench.

I do not believe that the extension of the discount range by 10 per cent. on the sale of flats will achieve the purpose that my hon. Friend the Minister intends. It is true that the provision might nudge up the sales rate of attractive flats in three-storey blocks in my constituency, but I doubt whether it will have any great effect on sales in tower blocks in inner cities, which is surely where we are seeking

to promote owner-occupation more than anywhere else. We wish to do so because that is where it is to be found less than anywhere else.

There are various ways in which the extension of owner-occupation in inner-city areas could be achieved. First, local authorities could be encouraged, or even required, to designate certain blocks as sales blocks so that those who bought would know that they would be joined by other owner-occupiers over a period of years. That would increase their confidence and it would lead to a greater market for the resale of houses.

Secondly, I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) was right about the need to experiment by putting some of those flats on the open market to see whether we could establish a proper market value on which district valuers could base their views.

Thirdly, there is more scope for refurbishment of existing blocks and existing estates than is contained in the Bill. I welcome the initiative money that my hon. Friend the Minister has announced. I am sure that it will result in many more experiments like that at Salford, which has yielded great benefits and owner-occupation at a low cost. That is more possible in the north and in the midlands than in the high-priced areas of the south-east.

I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about portable discounts and I commend his proposal to my hon. Friend. However, it is extraordinary that the hon. Member should have been in favour of portable discounts for tenants of local authorities when he and his hon. Friends did everything possible to frustrate the Government's desire to give a similar opportunity to the tenants of charitable housing associations.

I make no apology for discussing several omissions from the housing provisions of the Bill. There should be a legal requirement on local authorities to publish not only waiting lists for rented accommodation, but waiting lists for owner-occupation. Many of those on the waiting list for local authority accommodation would prefer to buy. A waiting list for that purpose would provide some guide to the local authorities in deciding housing policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne was right to say that the Bill should have contained measures to revitalise the private rented sector. I believe that decontrolling vacant tenancy would move us in the right direction.

We have not heard much about planning law during the debate, but it is an important part of the Bill. I welcome the proposals for simplified planning zones. I detect some ancestry in my modest work on the planning system published a few years ago, which has sold many copies to the Department of the Environment during the past year and a bit.

The main problem with the planning system is not the decisions that are made, but the slowness with which they are reached. In 1979 Slough Estates published a comparative survey showing that in the rival countries of Belgium, the United States and Canada it was much quicker to obtain planning permission for industrial development. In 1979, it took six weeks to obtain full permission for a 50,000 sq ft factory with 10 per cent. office content in Belgium, five weeks in the United States and four weeks in Canada. That compares with 32 weeks in the United Kingdom. It is little wonder that a mobile international company wishing to get its products on the market sooner than its competitors might seek to locate its factories in Belgium, the United States or Canada rather than the United Kingdom, if all other things were equal. Much more attention must be paid to speeding up the planning system.

The appeal system is one control over the speed of the planning system. Local authorities have eight weeks to make a decision on ordinary planning applications. If the local authority does not make a decision within eight weeks, the applicant can go to the Department of the Environment and appeal on the grounds of non-determination. However, that appeal takes 19 weeks to go through. What sort of sanction is an average appeal period of 19 weeks against a local authority that has not determined an application within eight weeks? The vast majority of applicants will tend to continue with the local authority system rather than going through the appeal system. They will use the appeal system only if the local authority decision has gone against them. It has no effect as a policeman of the speed of the planning system. That is something to which we should pay more attention.

Nothing is said in the Bill about the other great problem in planning — the adequacy of the training of local councillors who make those decisions. By the very nature of local authorities, there is an enormous turnover of councillors. Many hon. Members will be familiar with the fact that half the councillors may retire every time there is an election, to say nothing of those who lose their seats. All over again, councillors on planning committees must be educated about planning law. When people come fresh to the system they think of it as a response to public opinion rather than what planning law tends to be about, which is precedent, comparative decisions and the historic use of a site.

When new councillors are elected, many officers make strenuous efforts to inform and educate them, for example, by having seminars, but far too often local councillors choose to ignore the real planning law of the country, because they wish to play to the views of groups of their constituents. All of us know about the duress of having a large group in the public gallery that may not be representative of public opinion, but which, because it is howling down the necks of councillors, influences the way in which they approach the planning system.

I recommend that, when he considers the planning sections of the Bill, my hon. Friend should seek to ensure that councillors receive proper advice, proper counselling and proper education.

I welcome the Bill. It can be improved in Committee and I sincerely hope that when it returns to the Chamber it will achieve even more in moving towards its objectives of increasing owner-occupation for the British people, providing choice for the tenants of existing rented accommodation and speeding up and simplifying the planning system.

7.16 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I listened carefully to the Minister's opening speech. He said that the intellectual landscape had now changed and that we would not be returning to the local authority housing policies of the past. He called it "irreversible change". He said that the Bill was in line with continuing Government housing policy. I agree with the hon. Member. He is absolutely right. The Bill is another addition, cleverly introduced, to the counter-revolutionary process which has been going on in Britain since the Government were elected. All the

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

values, the traditions and the accepted modes are now slowly but surely — sometimes fairly quickly — being destroyed.

It worries me that some people have a strange idea about why we had and have local authority council housing. — *[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) nodding. He is a strange example of that strange idea. In Britain we have never had really good housing on a mass scale for ordinary working people. That position improved, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) mentioned, when the first legislation was introduced to build housing for the poor. The first council housing began in 1919. The great breakthrough came in 1924, with the Act introduced by John Wheatley—one of those mad, wild Lefties from Glasgow who happened to be a marvellous Roman Catholic and who believed in building houses for ordinary working people who could not afford to buy homes.

To listen to some people, one would imagine that those sections of our community have no problems. I do not know where some hon. Members have been hiding. Clearly, they have not been living in the real world. We could ask any of my hon. Friends who represent urban areas about what happens at their weekly surgeries, and they would tell stories of young people crying out for accommodation, sometimes having to live with their parents and sometimes separated from each other and their children. They cannot buy homes. Many of them are unemployed. Liverpool has 21 per cent. unemployment; in some areas of the city, the figure is between 60 and 65 per cent. On one estate, 80 per cent. of the people have no incomes except from state benefits. Where would they get the money to buy homes?

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), who said that he represented the building societies, has left the Chamber. I would like to send those people along to him and say, "You get them a mortgage. You get them somewhere to live." They have nowhere to live, and the only organisations that can help them are the local authorities. Some co-operative associations can help, but most assistance comes from local authorities. The Church of England report makes that point.

Some of my hon. Friends seem to be mesmerised by the word "choice". I hope that they will not remain mesmerised by it, because most working people have no choice. They do not begin to think in terms of choice. They cannot say "I will buy a house", or, "I will rent a house or go into a local co-operative housing association." Their only possible choice is that the local authority might offer them accommodation and allow them to turn down at least one offer. Even that is happening less and less.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Richard Tracey): I wish to pursue the hon. Gentleman's point about the availability of public sector housing to let. He is perpetuating the myth that we heard from the hon. Members for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) and Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). Is he aware that the public rented sector increased from 367,000 in 1979-80 to 410,000 last year? What is his explanation of that?

Mr. Heffer: I do not argue about the exact figures. All that I know is that the working people of Liverpool have no choice of accommodation, because there is no accommodation. Dwellings should be made available for them to rent.

The Liverpool city councillors — I will not refer to the court case—began to tackle the problems of housing in the city. They built houses to rent and began to pull down the old multistorey blocks with which nothing could be done——

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Sell them to the private sector.

Mr. Heffer: Even the private sector in Liverpool wanted nothing to do with them, apart from two blocks. They are still standing as monuments. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know about the Piggeries, I shall tell him. Liverpool city council is building houses to rent and is helping people to leave their present terrible accommodation or giving youngsters an opportunity to have new homes. At the same time, it has been starved of financial aid by the Government. Its HIP allocation has been reduced——

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): So has Lambeth's.

Mr. Heffer: Yes, and the council has been unable to deal with repairs as it would have wished. That is what is really happening in housing.

I do not usually make long speeches; I hope that I usually make effective speeches. I have listened to some rubbishy, long speeches from Conservative Members. Listening to the hon. Member for the building societies —which I shall call him from now on—I had a picture of my mother-in-law, who is aged 83, putting in a new bath, the poor disabled fellow who lives four doors away from her putting in a new bath, and the young girl who lives next door to her, whose husband died and who has two children, putting in a new bath. I have never heard such rubbish. It is time that they stopped talking rubbish and talked about building houses for the people, because that is what the Labour party intends to do.

I end by referring to the document "Homes for the Future". Some hon. Members seem to believe that it was produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), but he was only one member of the committee. I chaired the committee and I moved the report at the Labour party conference on behalf of the national executive. It is not my hon. Friend's report or mine; it is party policy accepted at the party conference and we all contributed to it.

The Government mention only one side of the story and try to suggest that we have suddenly accepted their philosophy. If they read the document, they will see that we reject their philosophy completely. We say that once those houses are built, there will be an opportunity for choice. If people have the wherewithal to buy homes, we shall help them, as we have always said we would. The report states:

"Finally, we know that in some areas, such as the inner cities, the shortage of council houses and of land to replace scarce council housing raises special difficulties. These could be considerable. In these areas local authorities will be free to determine whether, in the light of local circumstances, council tenants should be able to buy their houses."

We go on:

"Council tenants who wish to buy a home in the private market would be helped by the more general assistance available to first-time buyers, as noted above."

I shall not go into the details because they are all there. We are working on a scheme to help the first-time buyers.

That is our policy. I am not ashamed of it. I helped to get that through. The idea that there is a great difference of opinion between me on one side of the party and the Opposition Front Bench on the other is just untrue.

We recognise that there will be areas where we cannot automatically say that council stock should be sold. But we do say that when we get to a stage when there are no longer any real problems — that will take some considerable time unfortunately, especially after the Government have made it worse by every Bill that they have brought in—we shall carry out our policy.

Let us vote the Bill down and get it across to the people that once again the Government are putting their sectarian ideological views forward and privatising everything. The way that the Government are going, if they last a few more years we shall be paying out money to breathe the air that we need to live.

7.30 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): We have been down memory lane quite a bit this afternoon. Perhaps those of us who have been in public housing for many years will cast our minds back to some of the mistakes that we made. In my city of Southampton we bulldozed down, with disregard to the communities, many long streets of terraced houses that could have been modernised and rehabilitated. We broke up the families. We put people who were unused to flat dwelling into flats. We created the monster of the dissatisfied tenant.

I am sure that anyone who served on the local authorities in the 1960s will agree that in those days we could have easily restored the community spirit in some of our inner cities. Not only did we bulldoze the terraces down, but we built high rise flats to provide the maximum accommodation to rehouse the people from the terraces. Then we created vast concrete areas, all under the grand umbrella of the Parker Morris standards, and wondered why the poor demented people, who had been forced out of their individual homes to live way up in the sky in areas that were dangerous to transverse at night, wanted to move. We suddenly found that one of the worst problems was not that tenants could not get accommodation but that practically every other tenant wanted to move.

We must all accept that the problems arise from bad designs, bad workmanship and the fact that the high-rise blocks have become dangerous. We have had to evacuate the tenants from three high-rise blocks in Southampton, and they are another burden on the housing committee. All those mistakes happened when we as junior politicians were devising a housing policy. No one can blame anybody else. We are all responsible for the mess we are in.

If the public in the Gallery who were so appreciative of the speech made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) were fair, they would recognise that there has been a series of mistakes since the end of the last war. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree that when one reaches the conclusion that there has been a series of mistakes, there must be remedial measures. The only way that we can take any remedial measures in this place is with legislation.

I agree that we have had too many housing Bills. I sat on the Committee on the Housing Bill in 1972 which took five months to go through because we fought cat and dog all the way. Blood was on the carpet. Luckily it was verbal blood. If it were not, we probably would not fight quite so much. At the end of the day we created another series of problems for the people whom we were trying to help.

Having got to that point down memory lane we can start rationalising what is wrong. The Piggeries in Liverpool have been mentioned. That is a perfect example of what we are up against as politicians after many years of incorrect decisions.

Mr. Steen: What my hon. Friend says is perfectly true, and I am sure the House will agree that there have been a lot of bad decisions at local government level in public housing. It was not just the high rise blocks, the comprehensive redevelopment programmes of the inner cities or the vast, soulless council estates that were the mistakes. Every decision has been a mistake. What does my hon. Friend see as a solution? Many of the estates that were built 10 years ago are being blown up. Part of a housing estate has been blown up in my old constituency in Liverpool. If all the problems of the past 10 years are put together, they are all the result of mistakes, so what is the solution?

Mr. Hill: Of course, there have been mistakes, but I must reject my hon. Friend's argument that everything has been a mistake. One of the best periods of housing policy was when we brought in the general improvement and housing action areas. They worked successfully. It was back to my idea of the restoration of terraced houses in deprived parts of a city. One of the jewels in our policy was the housing action and general improvement areas.

However, to get back to the high-rise blocks of flats, what is to be done with them? No tenant wants to stay there. Anyone with young children wants to move into a house with a little bit of garden. Frankly, the only solution that we have is in the Bill. We must convince as many people as possible of that. Whatever one says in political terms, home ownership tends to make people more proud of where they are living. They try to improve their environment and look after their properties that much more. But I can see no hope for the large, high-rise blocks of flats. They will have to go. They are dinosaurs in housing terms.

But the tenants of blocks of flats that are perhaps four storey high, of which we have many in Southampton, will appreciate what is in the Bill.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The problem that the Bill presents is that we shall not be able to sell off the high-rise blocks even if local authorities want to do so. The more appealing blocks—the smaller, low-rise blocks—where the tenants most want to stay because they have a greater sense of community will be where there is most resistance to compulsory transfer from public sector ownership to somebody else or to getting the tenants out.

Mr. Hill: It depends whether the Bill's success is such that practically everyone in a four-storey block of flats will benefit from further discounts and from having the repairs worked out beforehand by the local authorities so that they know their financial status. It is also important that the common parts of the building with the service should be controlled. Many of my constituents are fearful of the stories that go around. Someone buys a flat in a four-storey block which comes within the rolling programme of the local authority for repairs and maintenance. Suddenly the new owner finds that he is responsible for a percentage of

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the cost of reroofing the whole building, the replacement of all the windows and the decoration of all the common parts. If he is on a low income but has managed to get a council mortgage by taking advantage of all the discounts, his financial budget is critical and he does not want the surprise of the extra expenditure. The Bill will eliminate that surprise. Many people will be induced to buy their flats because of the provisions in the Bill.

Clause 5 deals with the redevelopment of a house. It may be considered politically as harsh or sympathetic. The same happens under compulsory purchase orders when unfortunate people do not want to leave their homes. The explanatory memorandum says:

"The new ground (under which suitable alternative accommodation must be available) will apply".

I am not a barrister, but as chairman of a housing authority I have dealt with enough compulsory purchase orders to know the problems. That provision is as hard as possible in legal terms.

If a person wants equivalent accommodation or wants to live near his mother he may have problems if the local authority is inflexible. I hope that most councils will be flexible enough to give someone at least three alternatives. I think the suggestion from the Opposition was that only one offer should be made. That would be wrong when a local authority is dispossessing a person of his statutory home, which is what it is, because he is a regulated tenant and has possession.

No matter how much a private landlord wanted to redevelop a site he could not do anything like that. In Committee — not that I want to be on the Committee because I served for five months in 1972 and that will last me for ever—my colleagues should make sure that the Bill includes a proviso that three offers of alternative accommodation should be made.

I have the same doubt as has already been raised about simplified planning zones. It is a wonderful idea, but I do not see it working. The idea is that people should be able to build what they want and it seems that the developer would not even pay for the planning application. Everything is supposed to work smoothly. We have seen what has happened with enterprise zones and I am aware of the same thing with the freeport in Southampton. The schemes do not work as smoothly as seems possible when they are discussed in Committee. There are always obstacles that we politicians do not foresee.

Southampton is a most attractive specimen of the mix of one third council accommodation and two thirds private housing. When I left the post of chairman of the housing authority we had 23,000 council dwellings. Not to my horror, but perhaps to my surprise, when I talked to the Labour chairman of the housing authority just before Christmas I found that the council still had 23,000 housing units, although a sale scheme had been in operation since 1967. People should not fear the sale of council houses. The scheme should be used to the greatest advantage. The Government should be more lenient in future about the capital receipts from the sale of council houses. Some local authorities may abuse their powers and waste money but we shall not be able to keep the neck of the purse tied so tightly.

I hope that we are all on the same lines on modernisation, destruction of high-rise flats, the encouragement of as many tenants as possible to buy low rise flats and the operation of simplified planning zones. However, I fear that there will be many a squabble in Committee.

7.45 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): In expressing my grave disquiet about the Bill, I want to concentrate mainly on the housing provisions. I begin by making a brief reference to the principle of simplified planning zones, which are of great concern to me. There has been a tendency in some parts of the Conservative party in recent years to throw much doubt upon the planning system. There are frequent calls to sweep away the delays, the bureaucracy and the decisions by grey, faceless bureaucrats in planning departments. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The chorus of assent from the Government Benches demonstrates their attachment to that point of view.

The principle of simplified planning zones is nothing more nor less than a simplistic attack on the planning system as a whole for the areas that are to be designated. In making that attack the Government Benches have forgotten the basic principle that lies at the heart of the planning system — that people in a local community should have some control over what is developed in that area. The mechanism of the private market, the profit motive and the ownership of land should not be the only determining factors in decisions that are made on how an environment develops. The proposal for simplified planning zones will effectively remove local democratic control from the area and thereby remove the decision by the local community on how the area should develop.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman should appreciate that there is not on the Tory benches a desire to remove that control. The simplified planning zones will be brought into being by local authorities. On his general point, will the hon. Gentleman accept that the process he has described has been unsuccessful in representing the wishes of local people? That is demonstrated by many of the unsatisfactory housing conditions that we see in major cities. If what is happening is deemed to be the wish of the local people rather than the dreams of people in planning authorities and borough architects most hon. Members would be very much surprised.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my argument. Many examples can be given to show where the planning process, as operated at present, has gone wrong. However, there are other examples where the planning system has gone right for a change. I point the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) in the direction of the Coin street site in Lambeth. The basic point remains the same. The way to deal with the problem of bureaucracy and the way to cope with the difficulties that are imposed upon areas by a remote planning system is not to do away altogether with planning controls but to look at ways of democratising the planning process so that people have a genuine and real say in how their area is to be developed. Simplified planning zones will not achieve the democratising principle that ought to be at the heart of any examination of how the planning system can be developed.

I echo a point that has been made by several other hon. Members about the simplified planning zones concept. I am deeply concerned that designated conservation areas,

areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks—despite the brief, opaque reference in the Bill to national parks—are not specifically excluded from the possibility of being designated as simplified planning zones. I hope that during the passage of the Bill they will be excluded.

Many criticisms can be made of the housing provisions, but two of them stand out as being detrimental to housing in this country. The first is clause 5. In his opening speech the Minister sped over its provisions. Clause 5 relates to the new ground for possession of council property. Opposition Members have eloquently pointed out that it will enable local authorities which are determined to sell council property to sell it over their heads and against the wishes of council tenants. I hope that during the next few weeks Conservative Members will talk to the tenants of the Fulham court estate and find out how they feel about the prospect of the estate being sold over their heads and against their wishes. That is precisely the power that the Minister, by this Bill, wishes to give to local authorities.

The institution of a new ground for possession ought surely to follow the basic principles that seeking grounds for possession and allowing grounds for possession to be granted have traditionally followed for secure tenancies: either because a tenant has reneged on his tenancy obligations or because development or improvement work that is in his interests is taking place. Neither of those provisions pertains in the proposed new ground for possession. If the Bill becomes law, it will be possible for a tenant to be evicted from his home, not because his home is being renovated for another tenant to move into or for that tenant to move back into, or for the benefit of council tenants as a whole, but because it is to be sold and will benefit a private developer. That breaches the conventions upon which grounds for possession have traditionally been conceived. I hope that that provision will be defeated.

Equally worrying provisions are contained in clause 6. The Minister and Conservative Members have rightly applauded the opportunity that clause 6 affords to establish management co-operatives on estates. I welcome that provision. Before I became a Member of Parliament I worked for several years for a housing co-operative. I am an ardent advocate of the benefits that a co-operative, either a management co-operative or an ownership co-operative, can bring to housing management and of the degree of control that residents have over their environment. However, there is a grave danger that the baby will be thrown out with the bath water. Clause 6 makes it possible not only to form a management co-operative on an estate but to privatise the entire management of an estate or a group of council dwellings. It is deeply worrying that an estate could fall into the hands of an organisation or an individual who has no connection with the co-operative or with the tenants.

Whatever the failings may be—and they are many—of existing council housing departments, it is a horrifying prospect that private estate agents, or organisations, or private landlords could take over the management of accommodation. We would go from something that is frequently bad at present to something that would be, or could be, far worse.

Mr. John Patten: I have listened with care to the hon. Gentleman because I respect his experience in the housing co-operative movement, but does he not think that he has over-polarised the argument between public authority management and/or tenant co-operative management, as delegated by local authorities, and private sector management? There is a whole range of bodies in the middle to which local authorities might also welcome devolving management. Housing associations and building societies, under the new powers that are to be granted to them under the Building Societies Bill, are but two examples.

Mr. Smith: The idea of a building society managing a local authority housing estate is horrifying.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] For the simple reason that building societies were not established for and have no experience in and are unlikely to have any interest in the management of rented accommodation. Indeed, they are extremely unlikely to have at the heart of their concern the interests of tenants.

The principle upon which I hope any local authority housing department official or any Department of the Environment official will wish to operate is that the wishes of the tenants of an estate or of a group of houses are paramount. There are different degrees of tenant control, ranging from complete local authority management to full tenant co-operatives. The tenants may wish a housing association to assist them with the management of an estate, or some aspects of it. There is no problem about that, and I fully support it.

I hope that tenants will be able to opt for any of the different forms of control and participation that are available to them. I would welcome such a system, but I cannot welcome the open provisions that clause 6 makes available to local authorities that wish to shuffle off the arduous responsibility of managing their accommodation to the highest bidder. The clause would allow them to do that, but it would not be in the interests of or benefit the tenants of such an estate.

Even more worrying are the general assumptions that underlie the Bill. The Minister revealed those assumptions during the course of his speech. They characterise not just the Bill but the Government's housing policies in the last six years. He said, for example, that money had been poured into public housing in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the result has been vast impersonal estates. That as a bald statement of fact is probably correct. The vast impersonal estates that were built in the 1950s, 1960s and the early 1970s—and my constituency has its unfair share of them—are unpleasant places in which to live. They should never have been built in the first place and present management and maintenance headaches now for those who have to manage and maintain them. To leap from there to the conclusion that public housing as a whole is discredited and is a lesser form of tenure and a lesser form of housing enterprise than private home ownership is not sensible.

I invite the Minister to visit my constituency and to see some of the housing development that took place under a Labour Government by a Labour council in the late 1970s. That development took the form of rehabilitation of individual street houses on a large scale. It took the form of rehabilitation of old inter-war estates into good quality accommodation. It was an attempt to preserve on those estates the existing community of tenants.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) spoke about the preservation of communities. That initiative was developed and has been carried out on a considerable number of older tenants in my constituency. The tenants living on those rehabilitated estates found

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them very comfortable, decent places in which to live. On York Way court estate, the tenants sadly face the prospect of cuts in the further programme of work on the estate because the Department of the Environment is not permitting the project control application for the full cost of the next phase of work. I will be taking that up with the Minister in another forum.

The work which has been carried out to rehabilitate old existing council property, to buy up street properties and do them up and to build new houses with gardens in small closes and streets is very popular. It makes for good housing and provides decent homes for people to rent at prices they can afford. That was done by the public sector. To damn by implication the entire public sector by reference to the impersonal and inadequate work carried out in the 1950s and 1960s is unfair to the principle of public housing. One Conservative Member said that every decision has been a mistake, but I hope that he and other Conservative Members will reconsider their attitude to public housing which, at its best, in modern conditions and with an emphasis on quality, can indeed provide good quality accommodation for those who need it.

Because of the operation of the project control system, the cost limits which the Department of the Environment is now imposing, the drying up of housing investment programme allocations, the restrictions on the use of capital receipts by local authorities and all the restrictive measures that the Department of the Environment is now applying, the ability by local authorities to carry out work of that quality for people who want it has become virtually impossible. Tenants on Bentham court estate in my constituency who had been looking forward keenly to further stages of the estate action programme are being told that they have to wait for several years before the work can be completed. As a result, there is a family of 10 in my constituency living in a three-bedroomed flat who have been waiting for four years to move from that flat because the local authority cannot build a large enough house for them to move into. This can be provided only by the new build programme. For that state of affairs I am afraid the Government's housing policy and their attitude to public housing as a whole is undoubtedly responsible.

The Minister commented that public housing will continue to have a role, but a more specialised and narrower role. That means, in effect, that housing provided by the public sector will be concerned with the provision of housing for the urban poor. That is the future for public housing as seen by the Government. Their focus entirely on tenure and their assumption that the only form of housing with any validity is the home ownership form of tenure—assumptions which lie behind everything the Government have said — are against the wishes and interests of many thousands of people in the country. There should be available equally to everyone the choice to own or to rent. That surely is how we should be gearing our housing policy.

Many thousands of people in my constituency will find nothing in the Bill for them. I speak of those who are badly housed, who are homeless or who are living in inadequate, damp, mouldy and condensation-infested housing. The Bill does nothing for them. Nor do the assumptions the Government have been making in housing policy during the last six years.

8.6 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): This has been a spirited and thoughtful debate, although the Opposition seem to have mistakenly equated long speeches with good quality speeches. I hope that I can make an uncharacteristically short contribution on part II and part III of the Bill, which are concerned with planning and with putting public money into urban areas.

With regard to the planning aspect, I welcome any move to deregulate planning legislation. It involves too much bureaucracy and too many delays. Planning legislation has grown to become one of the greatest blights of our time. It has done more damage to the urban areas than any other factor. Many of our cities could hardly look worse if we had no planners at all.

The Bill simplifies one aspect of planning. However, rather than tinkering with the system, I believe that we need outright and radical reform. Planners see things in compartments. They see the inner city, the middle city, the residential zone and the vast council estates beyond the city boundaries, with industrial parks on the fringe. What they do not see is the individual needs of an area, and they are not flexible enough to be able to adapt to local problems.

The one thing the Government could do to restore the cities is to lift planning regulations lock, stock and barrel as they apply to the inner city so that the only things which cannot be done would be activities which were noisy to neighbours or offensive by way of smell, and buildings which were too high or blocked light. If planning control were lifted, the inner city would start to revive much more rapidly. People would want to live there and firms would want to go back there. If we continue with the current planning regime and merely tinker at the edges, there will be little change.

There is one matter about which the Bill is silent but which I feel that both sides of the House would like to see included. It relates to homesteading and shopsteading. Homesteading was started in London many years ago. It is practised all over north America. It is one of the most important factors involved in the revitalisation of the run-down inner cities.

Homesteading describes a process where a local authority sells, for a nominal sum, private houses which it has acquired through compulsory purchase. Instead of seeing the private housing sector deteriorate, one of the most effective actions a local authority could undertake would be compulsorily to purchase private houses which are declining and which are to be demolished and let them for £1, for example, to young married couples to restore and revive. The only condition would be that they live in the house for five years. The same applies to shops. In many run down city areas there are shops which have been abandoned by the retailers. The owners cannot relet them. The most effective way to save those shops would be to allow shopkeepers to buy them once they had been compulsorily purchased by the local authority provided that they continue to run the businesses for five years. I should like to see homesteading and shopsteading included in the Bill.

Zoning by planners is one of the most damaging things that happens to our cities. I represented an inner Liverpool constituency. I share with few other hon. Members the honour of representing a Liverpool inner city area, and also a rural seat some 300 miles away watching a city such

as Plymouth sprawling outwards towards the green belt outside. I understand the inner city and the rural problems. When I was in Liverpool a black man was doing some enterprising work in a small garage at the back of his garden. He found that there was a need for wrought iron gates. After a year, he was stopped, although he was employing two people, because he was working in a residential zone. He was not allowed by the planners to carry on, although no complaints had been received.

My first plea to my hon. Friend the Minister is that we should lift planning controls in the inner city, subject to certain restrictions, and that the planning regime should include a new approach to homesteading and shopsteading.

My second point relates to the need and desire to put more public money into urban renewal. The Government's greatest mistake is to pour more public money into inner areas. It will not solve the problems. Successive Government have poured billions of pounds of public money into a bottomless pit in the hope that it would result in urban renewal. The more public money pumped in, the worse the inner areas become.

The urban aid programme started in 1968. Harold Wilson believed that inner urban area problems would be solved by throwing £20 million at them. He started the urban aid programme. I pay tribute to him for doing that. He believed that £20 million would solve the problem, but today, of course, the urban aid programme is running at £338 million, and the problems continue to worsen.

In 1968, the Opposition shifted the rate support grant from the shire counties to the urban areas. They transferred £60 million from the shire counties to the inner urban areas in the belief that they deserved that help. Now the Conservative Government have done the same. They are shifting money from the shire counties to the urban areas. However, the Opposition voted against our proposal to help the ailing urban areas even though the Government have courted great unpopularity in the shire counties.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The hon. Gentleman is right, but he has missed the crucial fact that between the two years that he quoted the inner city areas lost billions of pounds. That was thieved by the Government and put into the shire counties. The Government are merely marginally redressing the balance. As that august and completely apolitical man the Controller of Audit at the Audit Commission has pointed out, the inner cities have lost 20 per cent., in real terms, of their resources under this Government.

Mr. Steen: I always find the hon. Gentleman's interventions helpful, but he failed to mention that between 1968 and 1986—he will be familiar with what the Government did — the Labour and Conservative Governments introduced the community development project, the young volunteer force, which I had the privilege to direct, neighbourhood schemes, quality of life studies, educational priority areas, the six towns studies, urban guideline studies, inner area studies, the urban deprivation unit, the comprehensive community programme and the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978. They were all designed to give additional money to ailing urban areas. It is wrong to say that nothing happened between 1968 and 1986. Labour and Conservative Governments poured more and more public money into the inner urban areas. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent on urban renewal by the public sector and yet the inner areas look worse, the people living there more deprived.

The Bill changes that direction and pours public money into the private sector to help them to renew the urban areas. That is the correct shift. That is the difference between previous legislation and this.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is surprising that the parts of our cities that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) wants to preserve — the conservation areas — were built by the private sector whereas the bits that he wants to pull down were built by the public sector? Does that not seem odd?

Mr. Steen: Many things seem odd. My hon. Friend has made a good point. The Opposition has spoken with great commitment and emotion. Because we have spoken with less fervour it should not be thought that we care less. All of us in the House care a great deal about the problems of people living in the inner urban areas. We care passionately about the problems of people living in council housing. We recognise that they have a great deal to put up with. That does not mean that we believe the Opposition's solution is any better than ours. On the contrary, we believe that our approach has some hope of success. Pouring more public money into the inner areas does not solve the problem, as we have seen for years.

There are three things that the Government should do to help relieve urban problems. The first, which I have mentioned before, is that the Government should explore the possibility of converting rental payments for council housing into mortgage repayments. People would not have to pay any more, and the benefits would be the same. If we could switch from public to private ownership, over five or 10 years, there would be the most dramatic change in the inner areas. People living in public housing would find that after five years they were living in private housing.

My second point is of great importance. People living in inner areas are short of cash. They need cheap money. They cannot obtain cheap money if banks charge them the ordinary rate of interest, or more, because they have no security. We need neighbourhood banks. Neighbourhood banks in the United States have shown that if people can borrow money cheaply they can renovate their houses and start small firms. The most effective way that the Government can help the inner cities is to make cheap money available.

My third point relates to the amount of vacant public land. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), who is not in his place. He mentioned the vacant land problem. I estimate there to be about one third of a million acres of vacant land in public ownership. The vacant land on the register, despite the amount that the Government have sold, continues to grow. Therefore, the Government should include in the Bill a provision to sell vacant public land at auction. That is long overdue. The only way to get rid of all the vacant public land in local authorities, statutory undertakers and Government is to have a massive auction. There should be a covenant in each lot sold that whoever buys the land must develop it within two years or re-auction it. Although more public money to inner cities will do no harm, it will not do much good either.

The Bill is a step in the right direction. It has the right ingredients to solve some problems, but the Government

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must stop pouring public money into this bottomless pit. It is the wrong medicine. The best medicine is to lift the rules and regulations, and to reduce the amount of bureaucracy. In one fell swoop the Government could do more for the cities than successive Governments have done during the past 18 years.

8.20 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall respond to the planning issues raised in the debate, in particular by the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), but first I shall deal with the housing issues, especially clause 5, which has implications for security of tenure, and clause 6. I wish to democratise all forms of housing tenure, and the control and management of estates. I should like to see far more co-operative housing developments which straddle the two poles of private owner-occupation and public sector tenancy. Many of my hon. Friends and I, who regard ourselves as libertarian Socialists, see the need to pluralise the forms of housing tenure.

I endorse all the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on that count. He stressed the need for greater tenant democracy—greater self-management by tenants of their estates, and greater collaboration on a community basis. I am worried that clause 6 will emphasise management by contract or consultancy agreement, rather than by the control of tenants. Similarly, clause 5 represents a severe reduction of tenants' freedom and security. The Conservative party often talks in the rhetoric of freedom, but in reality the material freedoms that it offers are rather different.

I share the anxiety behind part II, especially behind the notion of specialised planning zones. The zones originated in the infamous White Paper entitled "Lifting the Burden", in which planning policy was given the pride of place that the hon. Member for South Hams decried.

Mr. Steen: Only for the inner cities.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman would not abolish the planning system in the Snowdonia national park. The hon. Gentleman argued that the inner cities should not be planned as they have been since the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. That was the effect of "Lifting the Burden". The White Paper's emphasis was on extending the planning regime which was already established in the enterprise zones. Page 11 argued that the planning schemes had proved effective and successful in enterprise zones. However, we have had no evidence of how enterprise zones have been an economic success, let alone a planning success.

Enterprise zones were proposed by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey East (Sir G. Howe) as a "Socialist alternative" and "liberation approach" to liberate private enterprise from over-regulation, which the Conservative party diagnoses as Britain's major disease. He argued for a simplified planning regime, rate relief, maximum capital allowances and exemption from development land tax, and the legislation enacted that. The zones were designed to facilitate new firm formations, but one of their most conspicuous effects was the redistribution of existing activity so that the cost per job in enterprise zones was much higher than originally envisaged, as the *Financial Times* recently pointed out.

Much of the debate about enterprise zones has been an ideological one. When the former Chancellor was establishing them, he argued that if Labour-controlled authorities were queuing up for enterprise zone status, "we shall have gone a long way towards winning the debate" between the two philosophies.

The fate of the simplified planning zones will be similar to the fate and experience of the enterprise zones. The real inhibitions on growth in depressed centres and regions of the economy are the relatively high level of rents, rates and VAT and, in particular, the Government's deflationary policies. Those factors have inhibited enterprise, and they are not the planning practices of successive Governments.

The responses to consultation documents in Scotland, England and Wales have been negative. District planners, who will be responsible for carrying out the legislation, have raised strong objections to the proposals. Recently, I was in correspondence with Michael Jones, the chief planning officer of Dwyfor district council and the chair of the Society of Welsh District Planning Officers. He will be well known to Welsh Office Ministers. The Society of Welsh District Planning Officers is worried about the direction powers of the Secretary of State to local authorities in preparing the simplified planning zone proposals.

The Minister was slightly disingenuous when he said that if a local authority objected to a simplified planning zone, that would be the end of it. He implied that if a local authority was unhappy about establishing a simplified planning zone, and if there was an appeal as set out in schedule 3, the Secretary of State would not necessarily overrule that view. However, after careful reading of schedule 3, that does not seem to be the case. The Secretary of State has the power to direct the making of a scheme and the alteration of a zone. Clearly, this is yet another intervention in the freedom of local authorities. It is an insistence that local authorities shall pursue planning policies regardless of the view of the community and its elected representatives.

When the Minister replies, will he refer to what his hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction said, and confirm that schedule 3 confers override powers on the Secretary of State? Will he confirm that Secretaries of State will be able to override the view of a local authority, which may not wish to have a specialised planning zone in its area?

In Wales we are already familiar with the overriding planning policies of the Secretary of State. Only before Christmas the Secretary of State for Wales issued a most interventionist and fascinating draft circular for consultation with Welsh local authorities entitled "Housing for Senior Management". The blame for the Government's economic policies in Wales was laid, not at the door of the planning system, but on the lack of

"attractive locations for individually designed residences commanding privacy and space for executives in industry."

The document was released under his direction, but I do not know whether the planning section in the Welsh Office agreed with him.

The document has been rubbished by Welsh planners. I quote Michael Jones again, speaking as chairman of the Society of Welsh District Planning Officers. He said that the

"combined intelligence systems of local and central government",

had failed to decipher that there was such a shortage. He goes on to describe the draft circular in critical terms and proposes that the Secretary of State should withdraw it. No doubt the inroads into the planning system which the Secretary of State for Wales seeks to make in that aspect will be taken much further in the concept of the specialised planning zone.

I want to turn to something which is not in the Bill. There is no power for district local authorities or planning authorities in Wales to protect communities against the proliferation of second, or holiday, homes. Those properties should not be called homes because they are leisure properties, which are used by people for leisure purposes. I want to put on record, as I have before in the House and outside, my strong, unequivocal and unreserved condemnation of the recently resumed arson attacks against property in Wales. The arsonists are a threat to our society. They are dangerous exhibitionists who are preventing the possibility of change in the law governing second homes. They are giving the Secretary of State the excuse to rub his hands in resignation—not resignation from office—and say that what goes on in Wales in that way has nothing to do with him and that if the Welsh Office were even to meet those of us who have been trying to get changes in policy it would be seen as giving in to violence.

It is essential that legislation should be introduced to enable local authorities to control the increase in second and holiday housing. The Welsh Office should not be using its planning function, as it determines individual appeals, to override the attempts of local authorities to legislate in that area and execute policy in relation to local need.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): The hon. Gentleman referred to the Secretary of State having intervened to overturn planning decisions. That is not the case. As the hon. Gentleman knows, planning decisions are looked at by an inspector and in the cases to which I think the hon. Gentleman is referring the decisions were made by an inspector. The Welsh Office has not intervened in the decisions of inspectors.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the Minister, but I remind him that the local clause, which appears as a restrictive covenant on the sale of housing for holiday homes, or the sale of local housing to prevent it becoming holiday homes, is one to which his Department objects. That is also the view taken by the Department of the Environment. It proves my point that we need legislation to enable local communities to control the housing stock of their area rather than intervention by a central Government Department.

8.34 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): There are many reasons why I welcome the Bill but in the interests of brevity I shall confine my remarks to one of its provisions. I welcome the Bill because it seeks to grapple with the thorny problem of management of blocks of flats where some of the flats have been sold and some remain tenanted by local authority or other tenants. It is a difficult problem to try to harmonise that mixture of tenures. I should like to draw the Minister's attention to a development within my own constituency—Ruskin park house. I believe that that development provides a model of good practice in housing management where there is a mixture of tenure. It is a case study that might be looked at in detail when seeing how provisions in the Bill might work out in practice.

I shall briefly give details of how this fine development and its good management structure came into being. It was built in the late 1940s and early 1950s by the London county council and was tenanted by London county council tenants. During the early 1960s some tenants began to buy their flats. There are some 240 flats and over the years more and more were bought. In order to manage them, the Ruskin park housing association was formed. That association, a properly constituted and professional management body, took a long lease of 99 years in 1972 from the owners of the flats, the Greater London council as it then was, at a ground rent of £250 per annum. That arrangement has existed very successfully over the past 15 years.

It is interesting to note the proportion of owner-occupied flats to those that are still tenanted by GLC tenants. At present Ruskin park house is two thirds owner-occupied and has one third GLC tenants.

To understand how the scheme works so successfully it is necessary to give an outline of the arrangements. The GLC remains the ground landlord. It has a reversionary interest after 99 years from 1972. The Ruskin park housing association is the head lessee and it holds that lease for 99 years. Under that head lease individual owner-occupiers hold a lease just short of 99 years as sub-lessees. Therefore, the sub-lessee owner-occupiers are members, with one vote, of the Ruskin park housing association. The GLC tenants are there in a rather unusual way. They are sub-tenants of the GLC, which is a sub-tenant of the Ruskin park housing association. The GLC is involved in two distinct and separate ways. It is the ground landlord in one instance and is also the sub-lessee of individual flats, which it lets to its weekly tenants.

I feel the need to explain this in detail because saying that the arrangements have worked harmoniously with a mixture of tenants, tenure and occupants over the past 15 years implies a measure of agreement and good management which makes those tenants and owner-occupiers want to live there and enables the owner-occupiers to sell and pass on their interest in the property without problems.

When the GLC looked like living for ever, the Ruskin park housing association made an overture to purchase a freehold reversionary interest, that is to say, a period some 80 or 90 years hence when the ground rent for the unexpired term is a mere £250 per annum. That was turned down. When it was known that the GLC was to come to an end in March of this year the Ruskin park housing association, in July 1985, again approached the GLC to try to negotiate the purchase of the freehold interest, thereby merging the head lease with the freehold interest. It received no answer to that application. It made a further approach to the chairman of the GLC housing committee who said in his reply that the freehold interest along with the sub-leases of the individual flats occupied by GLC tenants would pass to the borough on the demise of the GLC.

Knowing what was in the Minister's mind and the legislation suggested in the Queen's Speech, I could not believe that that was right. I therefore wrote to my right

[Mr. Gerald Bowden]

hon. Friend the Secretary of State asking what the position was to be on the demise of the GLC. I was horrified to receive a reply dated 28 January 1986 from my noble Friend the Minister of State, who replied on behalf of the Secretary of State, saying that on the demise of the GLC the freehold interest in Ruskin park house would pass to the borough. The individual sub-tenancies occupied by GLC tenants would pass to the borough. There must be a mistake or a misunderstanding somewhere because if this were to happen in this estate, it would be a negation of the Bill's provisions.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the estate should be looked upon as a model of good management. One can imagine the pride of the Ruskin park housing association and its management body. I served on that body as a member of the GLC, representing those residents who were tenants of Ruskin park house, taking an interest in their affairs and making sure that their proper concerns were reflected vis á vis the owner-occupiers. One can imagine the horror that such tenants will feel when they discover that it is proposed that the freehold interest of the individual tenancies of the GLC flats are to pass to the London borough of Southwark. That borough is in the top league of mismanagement of housing, with rent arrears of about £23 million to £24 million. It cannot be in the spirit of the Bill or of good management that this should happen.

I urge that, when examining this provision of the Bill, special account be taken of what is to happen to the freehold interests of individual tenancies of Ruskin park house. This is a matter of great concern to my constituents and it will be of little consolation to them if the Bill goes through but Ruskin park house passes to Southwark council.

8.42 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) will excuse me if I do not comment on the detailed constituency points in his speech. As I realise that other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate, I shall concentrate on a small number of points basically concerned with housing issues. However, I have some questions about planning and the relationship between central Government and local government.

I am concerned about a drift in the Bill that is characteristic of the Government"s move to greater centralisation in the relationship between Whitehall and local government. Inner city problems, such as those in my constituency, are best tackled in a partnership between local government, central Government and the people who live in the areas.

Clauses 11, 12 and 13 provide the powers for financial assistance for urban regeneration, but there is no mention of local government. I hope that the Minister will comment on this point, because it appears that local government will have no role in the allocation and distribution of urban regeneration grant, or its priorities. If that is the case, the Government are taking a retrograde step because we need partnership, and the Government seem to be going in the opposite direction. I hope that the Department envisages some role for local government in the urban regeneration grant system.

Some planning points have already been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) made a point in the way that I should like to make it about planning in the inner cities. We all have criticisms about the bureaucratic nature of planning and we can all point to examples in which there have been mistakes and delays or with decisions with which we did not agree. We all recognise that bureaucracy needs to be moved, humanised and made sensitive to the wishes of people in the local communities. I must confess that I do not see simplified planning zones as the way in which we can make the planning process sensitive to the wishes of the people in the inner cities.

Many of my hon. Friends have said that we need a process whereby local people have the opportunity to participate in the way in which planning decisions are made if we are to recreate the climate that existed in inner cities many years ago before we made planning and housing mistakes, a climate of community and a sense that people help each and belong to each other. We shall not do that if we take planning decisions and decisions about inner city fund allocations away from the local community and place them in Whitehall. I should like a system—and perhaps the Minister will comment on this—whereby we can allow local people to plan their communities and have a say in their communites so that they can recreate a sense of community, which is crucially important in overcoming many of the problems in our inner cities.

I wish to comment on the Bill's housing clauses. I represent an inner city constituency, and increasingly, when people refer to me at advice surgeries or in letters, the problem that comes up is that of housing. People are looking for housing repairs to be completed, for better housing and for the ability to move into an area that they consider more desirable. The stress in housing in the inner cities is probably the greatest social problem that we face. I say that recognising the problems of unemployment and poverty in the inner cities. Clearly one cannot often differentiate between those factors, because they hang together.

Some problems have been accurately described in the debate. For example, there is housing that is decaying, often in owner-occupation. Estates have been badly built and conceived in the first place, and have developed a whole series of faults. In my city, there are many difficulties associated with system-built housing, high-rise flats and maisonettes in which people will not want to live and which do not provide the homes that many people thought that they would. In addition, the private rented sector makes accommodation available to the student population, but the quality of that accommodation is very low.

Those characteristics of housing in the inner cities are almost universally recognised and accepted by both sides of the House. What has been the Government's response to them? I see their response in my city. Since 1979, the Government have cut the real level of the housing investment programme by two thirds which means that more people who come to me or go to the local authority or local councillors with housing problems cannot be satisfied, because the financial resources are not available to refurbish the housing that needs it or to repair, improve or modernise estates that need it. Work is crucially

required in the high-rise blocks and, above all, new build is urgent in the cities, because that would help to create confidence and regenerate a sense of community.

The Government have cut back on housing in a way that establishes and magnifies the difficulties of the inner city areas, but the Bill offers no substantial additional housing resources. It places its faith in the belief that private enterprise will solve the inner city problems. That belief bears no reality to life in the inner cities. In my constituency, a high number of people are living on some form of state benefit. Those people will not be able to take advantage of any new owner-occupation build that may take place in the inner city through private enterprise. The Minister has offered no evidence that there is a demand for increased owner-occupation new build in the cities.

As to the right to buy housing in the inner city, with the difficulties that individual tenants face it is unrealistic to believe that that right, for that population, with that accommodation and housing, is anything more than theoretical. In practice, people will not be able to buy their council house or flat because they have neither the resources nor, in many cases, a desirable property to buy.

I suspect that the Minister would buy little of the council stock in central Leeds because he would recognise that it would be a bad buy. We need an effective partnership for housing in the inner city which acknowledges that there is a role for private enterprise in addition to the important contribution that housing associations can make. We need a partnership that perceives that the central role in tackling inner city housing problems should be played by local government.

If the Government are serious about giving the people of Britain accommodation that is decent to live in and which they can call their home, they should not reduce resources but increase them. The Government should get off the dole queues people who have the skills to build the houses which are desperately needed by so many people. Sadly, the Bill will not help in that process. I shall vote against the Bill tonight because it offers my constituents little when they have so many problems which a sensitive and caring Government would deal with.

8.50 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I welcome the Bill. It is a work of art. Much work has gone into it. It is a Bill of many parts. I cannot speak to all of them in the few moments that I have, so I shall deal with some of the planning aspects which concern me. The Bill has important schedules dealing with town and country planning, but the detail will need close examination in Committee.

Part II which proposes simplified planning zones is welcome in principle. It should reduce somewhat the load of environmentally unimportant planning applications in the planning machine at any given time. At the same time, I hope it will avoid the financial distortions which are sometimes implicit in enterprise zones.

I think that most hon. Members have received a briefing from the Building Employers Confederation which raises a concern which I share. Many local authorities are hostile to development anyway and if it is left to the local authorities to decide whether they are to be a simplified planning zone there will be no encouragement to them to implement such a possibility. Therefore, the Building Employers Confederation suggest that it might be wise for the Government to take the odium—if that is the correct word—of a decision to have such a zone and not leave it to the local authorities themselves.

Part IV of the Bill introduces a complex system for the presence of hazardous substances on sites. We have not heard very much about that this evening, and I believe that it will need close examination to avoid new burdens on industry and undue uncertainty in the movement of hazardous materials. The regulations which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will introduce will need close consultation with industry and businesses before they are introduced and implemented.

Part VI is miscellaneous and its implications and proposals will need close examination in Committee. The operation of the listed buildings procedure which clauses 24 and 32 will amend leaves much to be desired. Any reform which will make easier the prompt and appropriate amendment of local plans is to be welcomed.

I welcome the fact that the schedules to the Bill can be understood without reference back to previous legislation. It is an extremely well drafted Bill and there is no need to go fishing in old legislation to decide what the Bill is talking about when it proposes reforms.

In the few moments at my disposal, I wish to refer to the urban regeneration grants. So often in the past we have seen money simply poured into the local authorities either for council building or for regeneration. On many of those occasions there has been no commercial input in the decisions taken. We have seen some element of directive in Merseyside, in the London docklands and in Glasgow. We ought to see more of private enterprise taking an interest in these grants and the Bill will ensure this. Urban regeneration needs private sector enthusiasm—not soft-headed enthusiasm but hard-headed business enthusiasm —to see how one can best use the grants. Merely to give those grants to local authorities as we did in the past gave no incentives.

I welcome the urban regeneration grant and I believe it will go a long way to bringing the private sector into the regeneration of some of our inner cities. Such a policy has been pursued successfully in many of the larger and poorer cities in America. I had hoped to expand on how successful the urban development action grants had been in the United States, but I must leave that to another debate. However, they have been outstandingly successful and they have brought in private enterprise in a way which the Bill is just beginning to do, and I commend that.

In conclusion, I take one more thought from the briefing of the Building Employers Confederation—it sounds as if I am in its pay but I received the briefing, as did other hon. Members, the other day. It makes the valid point that urban regeneration is a good idea and let us go for it, but if it is a good idea do not take the money from the urban programme of grants in the first place. It is a good idea and let us have it on its merits. Let us have the funding and get on with it. In this way the Building Employers Confederation believes — and I share its belief—that there is much going for the regeneration of many of our worst inner urban areas.

I support the Bill.

8.58 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Bill is primarily about housing and planning and, in the context of housing, it is about the relationship between individuals, local authorities and the Government. I and

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

my party believe that the test should not be people's aspirations, but their needs and their aspirations. We do not accept that Government policy, as expressed by the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), should be to promote home ownership by all means. That is an insufficient housing policy. There has been a massive lack of Government investment and the Government have inhibited the expenditure of local authorities' capital receipts, yet it is proposed that £20 million should be found for urban regeneration grants. The *Building Trades Journal* described that sum as too little too late and as peanuts. The Government are not showing any commitment to resolving a problem which only they can resolve.

Of course there has been bad management in some local authorities. Mine is an example, and the Minister knows that I criticise it. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) mentioned it—it has a housing stock of more than 60,000 dwellings. However, its size does not excuse many of its management inadequacies. Southwark experiences the problems of the inner city and dereliction.

Hidden or exposed rolling privatisation, which is what part of the Bill is primarily about, and rolling deregulation, which is what the planning provisions are principally about, is not the required combination. The keynote should be true participation and true partnership. Although those qualities have been mentioned, they do not motivate the Bill.

Our objection to clause 1 is that there is no compensation for local authorities for the loss incurred when additional housing stock is sold under the right to buy. That is a fundamental defect of the right-to-buy programme and local authorities desperately need the money.

I welcome clause 2. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) and I know that one of the bugbears of the right-to-buy policy — I have just written to a junior Environment Minister about this matter again — is the enormously distorted service charge provisions and the amazing time that it can take for people to understand what they should pay and to discover whether they are paying the right amount. Those of my constituents who are grappling with the problem will be gratified to think that the service charge conundrum will be resolved. People will know how much they have to pay and the amount will be limited. They will have certainty. That will be welcomed.

The advantage of clause 3—the right to a loan—goes only a minimal way towards what many people in inner cities need. The Minister is aware of the problem. People who want to get out of the public sector often cannot find sufficient accommodation at low cost. The London Docklands development corporation and others have produced some housing for sale, but very little at a cost which young couples, who we especially want to keep in the community, can afford. I hope that we shall have much more than clause 3 to enable young people to have accommodation which they can afford and afford to maintain. That is essential if we are to integrate communities to the benefit of our cities.

Clauses 5 and 6 are clearly the most controversial. There is nothing like adequate protection in clause 5. The ground for possession—that the council have to offer suitable alternative accommodation — is inadequate. Why do not the Government allow the right of appeal? Why do they not allow a statutory right of consultation, which was found not to be an existing right in a case that was brought against Tower Hamlets at the end of last year? Why do not the Government allow a public inquiry? The Housing Act 1957 provides all three rights in respect of compulsory purchase. To possess property which people do not want to give up and to give them no right and possibly only one alternative offer goes against all the basics concerning the right of tenants which we should all want to uphold.

Clause 6 could be good. It enables co-operative management to occur, but I fear that it would also facilitate management that is not co-operative but private and in which tenants have no say.

There is no evidence that planning zones as proposed will be an incentive to investment in the inner city. All of the planning organisations confirm that the incentive is fiscal rather than a planning one. I and my party are worried that the simplified planning zone provision allows the Secretary of State to make the ultimate decision, whatever might be the view of the local, democratic planning authority. I hope that the Minister will say that the Secretary of State will use the power only in extremely limited circumstances. We want to know what they are. Unless he exempts also conservation areas, areas of outstanding beauty, nature reserves and sites of special scientific interest, the zones will pose another danger to the local democratic planning process.

I hope, too, that we shall hear that land and property, and title to them, will be registered publicly. I also hope that the proposals for urban regeneration will at all times involve partnership with local authorities and will not bring in the private sector on its own.

The Bill should be a partnership Bill, but I fear that it is not. Therefore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) said, we will be voting for the amendment and not for the Bill.

9.5 pm

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): As there is a very short time left at my disposal, I will have to skate over the surface of the Bill. I apologise straight away if I over-simplify matters.

I give a warm welcome to all the provisions in the Bill. I believe that the Bill is only one small step along the way to a much better housing philosophy. I believe, and I have written to the Minister expressing my view, that there are yet further measures which need to be taken to bring better housing stock and tenure back into operation. The amendment, which I hope the House will not support, is nothing more than a rehash of old sentiments put out by the Opposition. The Opposition do not have much to offer. I first worked on a local authority housing committee in 1967. In those days it was said that there was a housing crisis. They said there was a housing crisis between 1970 and 1974, another between 1974 and 1979 and they are saying the same thing again, that today there is a housing crisis dating back to 1979.

When I worked in a local authority it seemed to be the idea of local authority councillors that more and more council houses should be built to resolve the housing problem. I did not see that as a basis for a solution. I found that the more council house building there was, the more the waiting lists increased. Local authorities were chasing a never ending tail which they could never possibly catch.

When I was elevated to the position of chairman of the housing committee, I reversed the whole procedure. While I accept that I am over-simplifying the case, by building fewer council houses in my local authority and working in other areas, we reduced the waiting lists. We rehoused the people who needed rehousing far quicker by that method than had ever been done before. That was a compassionate way to behave. I saw people on the waiting lists in my local authority who badly needed accommodation, who had not previously been housed. These people were housed quicker through our housing policy than ever before.

I would like to make two important points. The first relates to local authority waiting lists, on which many local authorities base their HIP allocation, and the second relates to empty properties. The figures given by Shelter in the research document show that there are 1,217,000 people on local authority waiting lists. The local authority in my constituency has a waiting list, so they say, of 4,764 people. I beg everybody to look more closely at those figures. I suggest that those waiting lists are patently not an accurate reflection of the housing need. I discovered that through a personal examination of the lists when I was chairman of the local authority.

In Norwich, the city which I have the honour to represent, the waiting list of 4,764 is split up between those people in shared accommodation, which form 75 per cent. of the waiting list, and those in self-contained accommodation, representing 25 per cent. of the list. Of those in shared accommodation, 80 per cent. are single people. That does not represent housing need. The criterion for entry on to the waiting list is so wide that virtually anybody who is single could put their name down and become part of the statistics. My son could become part of those statistics. There are single people living with their parents on the waiting list who do not have a housing need. They are perfectly adequately housed, their housing standards are up to scratch and so on. Quoting such statistics does not give an accurate reflection of the criteria for what must be spent on housing.

According to the figures cited by the Department of the Environment, there are about 116,500 empty properties, 26,000 of which have been empty for more than one year. In my local authority area, there are 652 empty properties, 170 of which have been empty for more than six months and 300 of which have been empty for more than three months. That is a disgrace. Because of the number of empty properties, I believe that, instead of waiting for an indeterminate period before properties can be included in the housing stock, we should seriously consider the options. Some of the properties could be sold for owner-occupation, and the purchaser could do up the property. Some could be offered to people on council waiting lists, and they could do up the property. Empty properties could be brought back on to the market. That would be better than letting them stand empty for long periods while apparently nothing is done. People who badly want rehousing come to my surgeries. Something must be done about the length of the waiting lists and about the empty properties. Many local authorities do little or nothing about those properties.

I support the Bill. I hope that I catch the eye of the Chairman of the Committee of Selection so that I can give my hon. Friend the Minister support in Committee.

9.11 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Three things are certain about the Bill—it is 158 pages long; it costs £8·60; and it is a long and expensive missed opportunity to deal with the crises in the inner cities and in housing which have been so vividly illustrated in the past 12 months. They have been illustrated in the worst possible way, with the streets ablaze in my consitutuency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and with even murder becoming an ingredient of the inner city brew. They have been illustrated in a more thoughtful way in the reports that have thumped on to the desk of the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction and the Secretary of State for the Environment, which have usually been dismissed by the Prime Minister before officials have even had a chance to study the contents.

We started the debate with great expectations. We had a new Minister with responsibility for housing and we even had the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the Front Bench. We thought that there would be a stunning new announcement, a change of heart about the Government's financial policy towards the inner cities or some new, great initiative — financial or otherwise. Instead, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor departed as soon as the introduction of the Ten-minute Bill to reintroduce the lump. We now know from listening to the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction that there certainly is not a General Patten driving a new housing policy.

There are parts of the Bill with which we disagree, and we have spelt them out in the amendment. There are parts of the Bill with which we agree, or do not disagree. Labour Members, and most recently my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), agree that the contents of the Bill are dwarfed by the scale of the problem to which the Bill is supposed to address itself.

I hope that the Minister will listen seriously to the constructive suggestions on what should be in the Bill and has been omitted from it. There is the right to rent. Every hon. Member—Tory, Labour and Liberal alike—agrees that the shortage of rented accommodation is our greatest affliction. Let us have some unanimity about introducing a right to rent. That argument has been well rehearsed and is contained in our policy document "Homes for the Future".

Mr. John Patten: Private sector.

Mr. Fraser: Let us have the right to rent private sector accommodation. Let us give someone who is in need of accommodation the opportunity to move into empty premises. Let us have the right to sell, which can be enjoyed by the elderly. Let us have the right to buy. If we are to have a Bill which furthers the right to buy for those living in flats, let us have that right extended to private sector tenants. That idea is supported by the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones). That right should be available to private tenants and collectively to tenants of leasehold homes.

Let us try to insert provisions in the Bill in Committee for repair and improvement grants. There has been a call from hon. Members on both sides of the House to take up that aspect of Government policy. It is true that the Government had a reasonably good record on repair and improvement grants from 1979 to 1983. As the amount of

[Mr. Fraser]

money spent on new construction decreased, the amount directed to repair and improvement grants increased. The Opposition welcomed that in part, but that policy came to an abrupt and cruel end shortly after the 1983 general election, when the Government told us that it was not the job of a Government to repair people's homes.

If there is one thing which can make a contribution to preserving the old terraces in inner city areas and the sense of community, preserve older houses for this generation and the next, bring local employment quickly into inner city areas and bring hope to those whose homes are in disrepair and who are on low incomes—perhaps they are retired or unemployed—it is repair and improvement grants.

I am sure that I share the experience of many hon. Members on both sides of the House when I attend my advice bureau. Some of my constituents tell me that their roof is falling in or that they have discovered dry rot. Many of them are owner-occupiers and they do not know how they will spend the rest of their lives in a home which they are unable to repair. There is little chance of them obtaining local authority accommodation.

Surely we could build on the coalition of interest that exists between the many poor, disabled and often elderly owner-occupiers — they do not have mortgages and consequently they do not enjoy tax relief — and the interests of council tenants whose homes are in need of repair, a fact which has been identified by the Government's investigations into the cost of repairing public housing. Surely we could bring together that coalition of interests and take action on repairs and improvements, whether in the private or public sector.

The Government have virtually phased out repair and improvement grants in many of our inner city areas, irrespective of their political control. Everyone agrees that it is the shortage of housing investment programme funds that has brought that about. There is a contradiction because the Government have chosen to introduce the urban regeneration grant in clause 2. I am not opposed to any form of grant for urban regeneration, but the Government have introduced the principle of the urban regeneration grant for industrialists while phasing out the same grant that would have gone to owner-occupiers. That is a strange contradiction when dealing with the inner cities. It suggests that the Government have adopted the blindfold and the sticking of a pin in a board as their policy initiative.

I hope that the Government will take into account the comments that have been made about simplified planning zones. There is great fear in conservation areas and green belt areas about the effect that they could have on the environment generally, and on unspoilt areas especially.

The provision within the Bill that facilitates the selling off of local authority accommodation will allow some local authorities to abdicate their responsibilities. Example is a good teacher, and a good example is Fulham court. It is owned by the Tory borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and it should be said that the Tories are kept in power in that borough by two Liberals. I know that estate very well. I lived in Fulham, my agent used to live there and I used to go babysitting there. That estate is an especially good example. We can put the clauses to the test in the May local authority elections and in the by-election that is coming shortly. A Bill that enables the Tory Hammersmith and Fulham council to sell off that estate is enabling the local authority not only to abandon ship, but to sell the lifeboats.

It is not as if Hammersmith and Fulham does not have a housing problem. In the last financial year Hammersmith and Fulham had 1,493 homeless families. The Government are proposing to sell off an estate that has 200 vacant flats, so they will not remain available for letting. In the last financial year Hammersmith and Fulham accepted 635 families in bed and breakfast accommodation. There is no shortage of demand for rented accommodation in Hammersmith and Fulham, yet the Tory Government, in collusion with the local authority, are introducing legislation to divest that authority of accommodation that could be available to meet the needs of the homeless.

A similar development is taking place in Westminster. I wanted to give the House the figures for the homeless in Westminster and for the number of people in bed and breakfast accommodation, but the Tory Westminster city council neglects its responsibilities to such an extent that it does not return statistics to the Department of the Environment to reveal how many homeless families there were last year and how many were in bed and breakfast accommodation. We must rely on the figures for 1983-84, which show that 964 families were accepted as homeless and 632—almost the same number as Hammersmith and Fulham—were in bed and breakfast accommodation.

The most objectionable part of the proposals is that they will not only lead to a loss of housing accommodation within the control of local authorities, but the operation will be carried out against the wishes of the tenants. The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) mentioned the extraordinary contradiction of a Government who increase the bureaucracy of local authorities by requiring them to obtain the consent of the Secretary of State to transfer mortgages, which they transfer only to generate funds for housing investment, and at the same time remove from local authority tenants the right to have some control over their landlord.

It is clear from the Archbishop of Canterbury's report that we must try to remove the sense of despair and alienation from our inner cities and our problem estates. We must make people feel that they matter and that they will be consulted about decisions that affect their lives, buildings and surroundings. They must feel that they will not be overridden and ignored. Clause 5 allows some authorities to act as "winklers" and agents of gentrification over the heads of local authority tenants.

During the debate, there has been much discussion about flats. From parliamentary questions we know that when the scheme first started about one flat was sold for every 54 houses. Now that relationship is narrowing and about one flat is sold for every 20 houses. However, it is clear that in many areas of the country, especially in the inner cities, it would not matter whether the discount was increased to 100 per cent. People would still not want to buy flats. Why will people not buy flats that are now being offered at market value with substantial discounts? They do not like to live in flats. They know that if they buy their local authority flat they abdicate the chance of a transfer to a house. Also, they do not want to buy flats because it is difficult to resell them. I do not believe that the people in the Gloucester grove estate in Peckham would wish to buy their flats and it is easy to understand why. A newspaper article states:

"The 1,200-home Gloucester Grove Estate in Peckham is already boycotted by doctors, social security staff, milkmen and cab drivers."

In the words of Billy Connolly, even the alsatians go round in pairs.

The estate is likely to be boycotted by prospective purchasers, even if the discount is increased to 70 per cent. People do not wish to buy those flats because they are unsafe, difficult to manage and defective. As the Government have identified, many of them are subject to horrendous service charges. The Government will not solve the problem with their clauses on service charges, because the local authorities will so exaggerate their service charges as not to make a loss during the first five years. That would be the responsible way of doing it. In other cases, there will be real problems. If a housing association makes a genuine estimate of its service charges for five years and then discovers an unexpected service item, it will be driven into a loss or will have to put the expenses, which cannot be recovered from the owner-occupiers, on to other tenants.

Of course, not all blocks of flats are undesirable. Even in Brixton, some warden-controlled tower blocks are well maintained and people want to live in them. I am sure that other hon. Members have similar examples in their constituencies. It is a great mistake to categorise all blocks of flats as places in which people do not want to live. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) said, some council estates are ghettos. I would describe them as urban cages from which people find it difficult to escape. In some estates, there is great intrusion by noise and by burglars——

Mr. Heffer: They are not all like that.

Mr. Fraser: No, they are not all like that, but some are. They are called hard-to-let estates; as Professor Donnison said, they are hard to live in. None of those problems will be cured by increasing the discount to 70 per cent. This summer, the Government will have a sale and will knock down the price of flats. But the Government do not even act like business men. If a business man was selling old stock, he would put the receipts into new stock. The Government will not allow the local authorities to do that. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities calculates that local authorities will be left with about £450 to spend for every flat that they sell under the new provisions. At the same time, £6·3 billion is locked in the coffers of local authorities which could be spent on housing improvement.

The Opposition do not object in principle to the sale of local authority homes, to people owning their homes, to co-operatives running estates or to local authorities being landlords. That is a matter of choice. However, we object to the freezing of funds that could improve those difficult estates. The Bill provides no hope to those who are locked in those flatted estates.

The Bill does not take the opportunity to allow leaseholders of residential flats at least to improve the quality of their management. The Labour party's policy statement "Homes for the Future" had no doubt about what the new rights should be: the right to hire and fire the managing agents in blocks of flats; maximum limits for management fees; the right for leaseholders to examine the accounts of the freeholder; the right to extend a lease, which already exists for the lessee of a house; and the right for the tenants collectively to purchase the freehold and to deal with any defects that arise in leased premises.

The Government have received the report of the Nugee committee. Its recommendations do not go far enough because its terms of reference were limited, but I make this offer to the Government: if they will table the few clauses that are necessary to legislate for the limited recommendations of the committee, the Opposition will give them fair passage. Of course, we reserve the right in the future to legislate on the wholesale enfranchisement of leasehold flats, but the immediate problem of those in tenement blocks is so long-standing and urgent that we offer this compromise in the hope that it will be an offer that the Government cannot refuse.

Secondly, we offer full co-operation for the Government to add to the Bill a clause against the racial harassment of tenants by specifically making racial and other forms of reprehensible harassment grounds for possession and a criminal offence. I understand that some forms of harassment which constitute racial harassment would perhaps be grounds for possession on the grounds of nuisance, but that is not always so. We in this House need to underline our detestation of racial harassment and to incorporate a clause which makes it grounds for possession. After all, if to want to sell to a private landlord is to be a ground for eviction it should certainly be a ground for eviction if somebody has been guilty of racial harassment against fellow tenants.

Thirdly, the Government have always berated local authorities about the number of empty homes, although they fail to underline that often homes are empty because local authorities do not have enough money to spend on improving and repairing homes that they have acquired to bring into the rented stock. Labour members are against unnecessary empty homes, whether in local authority, housing association, private or Government ownership. As has been said, the Government are the worst offender.

I came across some examples when I was in Leicester last week. Leicester has a private stock of homes of just under 70,000. It has a massive waiting list and a great housing problem, yet it has 4,000 empty privately owned homes. Why not introduce in the Bill a right to rent similar to the do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme which the Government had a couple of years ago? That was a successful scheme so they had to abort it. Let us have a right-to-rent arrangement which can be triggered off not by any bureaucracy or Government intervention but by the action of a person who is homeless or in need of a better home.

The secret of improving our housing is to use the rights of occupants to trigger off action. Do not leave it to local authorities or to Government but to the tenants, occupants or residents to demand what they want. Allow people the right to demand that a local authority should buy an empty house to rent to them. Create the right for tenants collectively, if they are dissatisfied with the management of their private or public landlord, to form a co-operative. I know that the Bill deals with the privatisation of management, but it does not create the right for tenants and residents to bring those things about. If one creates rights, one can start to deal with the fundamental defects in the management and sometimes in the property itself.

It was on the inner city that we expected the Bill to respond to the challenge which had been thrown down by the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission, and indeed

[Mr. Fraser]

by the events of the past 12 months. Yet it is on the inner city that we find the Government's policy at its emptiest and most threadbare. Against all that has happened in the past year and all that may happen in the forthcoming year, we expected some new initiative, but what have we got?

Between £10 million and £20 million has been allocated to an urban regeneration grant. That is less money than the Government fined Lambeth in the financial year 1984-85. I represent an inner-city area. We were fined about £17 million in penalty against urban aid of about £13 million. Liverpool was fined £3 million. One has only to multiply that by six to get the amount of the new initiative which the Government are announcing in the Bill. Islington was fined between £10 million and £15 million.

We have the extraordinary situation at the moment where the amount of subsidy being paid by council tenants into the general rate fund exceeds the amount of money —£393 million—which is coming from the Government to aid local authorities that have deficits on their housing revenue account. After a year of riot, murder and criticism all the Government can bring forward is an initiative which produces £10 million to £20 million and which bypasses the partnership principle which has been regarded by many hon. Members as a useful way of tackling the inner-city problem.

On 28 January we had the announcement about the new urban aid programme. There is not time to go through it all but the *Financial Times* said that the total

"represented an overall cut in real terms of around 5 per cent."

That is the scale of the Government response. There were ferocious riots in Birmingham. Commenting on the amount of aid for deprived areas, the *Financial Times* said:

"The seventh, Birmingham, had its cash allocation held at £24·5 million, suffering a lower cut in real terms than the others because it 'has an exceptionally large scale of problems and a good record in the effective use of resources,' Mr. Patten said."

If the Minister thinks an authority has a good record it still gets a cut in its allocation but its reward is that the cut is slightly less than the cut in, say, Lambeth.

In the Bill the Housing Ministers had a chance to bring hope to the homeless, to bring imaginative proposals to owner-occupiers desperate for help with repairs and to take at least some steps towards emancipation and control for those who own leasehold flats. The Bill presented an opportunity to help the first-time buyer to jump the double hurdle of spiralling interest rates and house prices. It could have introduced meaningful rights for tenants to play a constructive part in the management of their estates. It could have dealt with the seething discontent and the social fragility of the inner city which erupted again last year. It could have captured the growing consensus about housing policy which we have seen in the debate and which is emerging from all the reports on the subject.

What have we got? Instead of taking the chance to use a prime legislative spot to build a new housing edifice, the Government have presented us with 158 sheets of legislative corrugated iron. The Bill is a short-life property from what ought to be a short-life Government.

9.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Richard Tracey): Despite what the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) has just said, we have had a most interesting debate on a useful Bill. We have had, of course, the usual Armageddon-style reasoned amendment from the Opposition. We have just had some rather cynical, or what some might describe as concrete, rhetoric from the hon. Member for Norwood.

Despite the way in which the legislation has been treated and despite the amendment, the variety of points raised by right hon. and hon. Members reflects the wide range of subjects on which the Bill touches. There has been broad agreement on many of them. We have heard from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) of the people's right to decent housing. We would not disagree with that, and we believe the provisions of the Bill will assist it. We have heard from the hon. Gentleman about the management standards of public sector housing. We agree with that and have made provision in the Bill for the training of managers. The provisions all contribute to the achievement of our aim to enable people to make their own decisions about their homes, to encourage urban regeneration, to protect the environment, and to reduce the burden of regulation.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing referred in his opening speech to the major advances we have made since the Government came to office — not just successful individual policies, such as the right to buy, but much broader changes that we have brought about in the assumptions that people make about housing.

We have won the big housing arguments. It was a joy to me to hear the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) claim credit for "Homes for the Future" which includes—in, I believe, a slightly tricky way—the right to buy. We have changed people's assumptions about who can expect to be a home owner; how much say tenants can expect to have in the way that their homes are managed; what is the dividing line between the public and the private sectors; and what contribution private resources can make to meeting housing needs. On all of these issues, perceptions have changed greatly.

In the case of home ownership—the greatest of all the changes—since 1979 more than 900,000 council houses and flats have been sold into home ownership under the right to buy and similar schemes. Most of them have been sold to sitting tenants who would not otherwise have had the chance of home ownership. That has completely altered the climate of tenants' expectations. But it goes even further than that. Something like 90 per cent. of households in the younger age groups expect to be home owners sooner or later.

Mr. Winnick: If the Minister and his colleagues take pride in the fact that council tenants have the right in law to buy the place in which they live, should not that right also be given to private tenants? We have not had a satisfactory answer to that question.

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman will realise that public sector housing is public and that it is therefore subject to disposal by the Government, whereas private sector housing is not subject to disposal by the Government. Our policies recognise the change in expectations and build upon it. The Bill will improve the opportunity for tenants to buy their homes, a point that has won the widespread approval of my hon. Friends. There was an excellent contribution to the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) who has made such a great contribution to housing in this country.

We also heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) and for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones).

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tracey: No; I must get on.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Tracey: Opposition Members may like to note what I shall say next. The Bill does not mean that the Government are neglecting tenants who cannot or who do not wish to buy. The statistics prove that today there are more public sector units for rent than there were in 1979 when the Government came to power. I pointed out earlier to the hon. Member for Walton, who failed to respond, that 367,000 housing units were in public ownership in 1979 and that 410,000 units are now available for rent. That is fair proof, surely, that the Government have the tenant in mind, too. This Government strengthened the position of such tenants by introducing in 1980 the tenants charter. The Labour party may carp, but tenants will remember that they were not allowed to carry out improvements to their homes. They could not even paint the doors of their homes the colour of their choice. That was the legacy which the depleted Opposition Benches left to us.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: The Bill will enable us to do more for tenants. It will open the way for new forms of management delegation. It will enable us to grant-aid new initiatives to improve the quality of housing management. It will enable us to get new agencies involved in managing rented housing. I point out to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) that we shall consult, just as we consulted over the Thamesmead trust, of which he was a favourable observer. I was surprised, in the face of what he said, when he announced at the end of his useful contribution that he would vote against the Bill tonight.

The suggestion that the Bill is a threat to tenants' security is laughable. In fact, there will be a new statutory guarantee of tenants' right to buy where occupied property is transferred to another body. I hope that that will go some way towards answering the points made by the hon. Members for Perry Barr, for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Bootle (Mr. Roberts). If property has to be vacated before disposal, the new powers in the Bill will come into play only where a redevelopment scheme has been approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

As to the point on consultation, we will consider this in Committee. It will also be necessary for the court to be satisfied that suitable alternative accommodation is provided for any tenant who is asked to move.

Mr. Rooker: What if they do not want to move?

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend will probably be well aware that between here and the Oval are several vast GLC-type blocks currently under the control of local authorities which are completely vacant and have been vacant for years. In fact, there are hoardings against the edges of them saying that they do not have the money to do anything with them. Will my hon. Friend take action to ensure that, if the local authority cannot take any action, somebody else can, even if it is to provide housing for rent?

Mr. Tracey: I have no hesitation in saying to my hon. Friend that this is a scandal and disgrace. Unfortunately, it is the sort of thing which characterises Labour administrations in too many parts of the country. It is a shame that the hon. Member for Norwood, who represents part of that borough, did not say something about it.

At one point in the speech of the hon. Member for Perry Barr, the Spencerbeck estate in Langbaurgh was mentioned and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) intervened. I am aware that certain tenants are resisting the local authority's attempts to include their houses in the refurbishment scheme being carried out by the firm of Barratt. Whether the local authority is entitled to obtain possession is, of course, a matter for the courts. I understand that proceedings are pending. That being so, the House will not expect me to comment further on this aspect of the case.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Rooker: If I am correct, the sub judice rule does not apply to legislation, and there is no reason why the Minister cannot comment further on this. Is the Minister in favour of tenants who do not want to move being thrown out of their homes for the simple reason that someone wants to do them up and sell them—yes or no?

Mr. Tracey: I am amazed, given the experience of the hon. Member for Perry Barr—he has been in the House longer than me—that he does not realise that we do not comment on specific cases.

New initiatives are being pursued, but not at the expense of tenants' rights; rather, to make those rights a reality so that tenants get the housing conditions that they are entitled to expect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne spoke about the sale of flats. He made some valuable suggestions which we shall consider about the realistic valuation of flats, about increasing the discounts after 30 years of occupation, and on the qualifying period. We are determined that the occupiers of public sector flats will have the opportunity to buy and will be assisted in dealing with——

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to raise a point of order?

Mr. Nellist: Yes, Mr. Speaker. If I may be of assistance, the Minister has refused to answer a question —[*Interruption.*] It is a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants to be of assistance to me, that is a different matter, but I do not think that he will be of assistance to the Minister. What is the point of order?

Mr. Nellist: The Minister has refused to answer a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). The Minister said that a court case meant that his answer would be sub judice. The Library briefing paper for tonight's debate mentioned Langbaurgh and the background to the case. I am asking you to rule, Mr. Speaker, on the point that if

[Mr. Nellist]

the Minister is correct, the Library paper is sub judice. If it is not, the Minister should answer my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Speaker: If I may clarify the matter, the sub judice rule does not apply when legislation is being discussed.

Mr. Tracey: I think that it would be better if I did not comment—*[Interruption.]*—on the details of the case. I shall return to the subject of the sale of flats.

Mr. John Fraser: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Tracey: The sale of——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Only one Member should be on his feet at a time.

Mr. Tracey: The sale of flats is critical. It has been said that it is impossible to sell some flats in the public sector——

Mr. Fraser *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: I shall not give way because I am short of time, and I have a great deal to cover.

Flats can be sold in the public sector given the will. I draw the attention of the House to the borough of Wandsworth, which has sold over 4,000 flats to sitting tenants, all with vacant possession, because it had the will to market them.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) mentioned Ruskin park house. The picture of Southwark's right-to-buy sales is not as black as my hon. Friend painted it. It is likely that during the current financial year Southwark will have sold about 200 units under the right-to-buy provisions and it expects to sell a further 100 units in 1986-87.

Mr. John Fraser *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman overran his time.

In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend talked about the inner cities and said that it is the Government's intention initially to use the new powers to support area-based renewal. We believe in partnership. We want to encourage the private sector to use its resources and ideas. We cannot afford the projects without the private sector. The experience of post-war large-scale municipal development suggests that we should not, even if public sector resources were available.

Urban regeneration grants are further evidence of the Government's commitment to urban areas and a natural development of their policies. Since we came to power we have expanded the urban programme from £93 million to £300 million. We have expanded the derelict land grant from £21 million to over £80 million in the current financial year and have concentrated expenditure on urban sites. We have introduced urban development corporations, with their dramatic effect on London and Merseyside docklands.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: We have introduced enterprise zones, removing obstacles and providing incentives to development. We have pioneered garden festivals in Liverpool and more are planned in Stoke, Glasgow and Gateshead. We have introduced city action teams to guarantee the delivery of departmental programmes in the partnership areas, and we have introduced the urban development grant, which is levering private sector investment into inner city areas—£82·5 million of grant is expected to lead to a total investment of £436 million.

Even by the standards of the cynics on the Opposition Benches, that is an impressive list. The introduction of the new power shows that we are not resting on our laurels. We have perceived a gap in our weaponry and are taking this opportunity to close that gap, and mobilise——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One at a time, not three.

Mr. Tracey: We are taking this opportunity to close the gap, and mobilise the private sector further in the attack on urban dereliction. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are coming to the end of an important debate.

Mr. Tracey: I turn now to the planning proposals which make up the remainder of the Bill. They include the provisions on simplified planning zones, hazardous substances, and opencast coal, as well as the variety of other proposals in part VI. The town and country planning system has not changed in its essentials since it was established in 1947. The planning provisions in the Bill do not represent radical change. On the contrary, they are sensible incremental inprovements designed to simplify the system and increase its efficiency, and to strengthen the protection of our environment and heritage. We remain wholly committed to protect and enhance the environment in town and country, preserve our heritage of historic buildings and rural landscape, conserve good agricultural land, and maintain the green belts.

On simplified planning zones, the principle of simplifying the arrangements for obtaining planning permission in selected areas has been applied successfully in the enterprise zones. It is right that it should now be made available more widely. The arrangements for making the schemes, which are set out in schedule 3, give special emphasis to public consultation and the consideration of objections. The process is similar to that for making or altering local plans. There will be ample opportunity for people affected by a proposed scheme to make their views known.

Mr. Rooker *rose*——

Mr. Tracey: I shall conclude on a major matter of doubt and difference which still exists in the House. In 1983 the Labour party said that it was against the right to buy. A recent statement of Labour party policy is given in the document "Homes for the Future" which the national executive produced at the 1985 Labour party conference. It states:

> "We believe it is right that council tenants should keep the right to buy their homes. Local authorities will be free to determine whether in the light of local circumstances council tenants should be able to buy their homes."

Who would decide which areas? Would a council be free to deny tenants the right to buy? The document continues:

> "The local authority would have an automatic option to repurchase at market value any homes sold under the right to buy."

How long would that take? What will happen if a council cannot afford to buy back? The document further states:

"This could present problems in relation to discounts." They will apparently be absorbed into Government help for all first-time buyers. Does that mean less discount? If so, many tenants will be deprived of their right to buy.

The document is unclear on what the Labour party's policy is. It leaves the tenants completely in the dark as to who will be able to buy and at what price. Tenants will want to know. One only needs to note the example in Glasgow where there is intimidation of tenants who suggest that they want the right to buy.

I began by saying that I believe that the Bill will be a useful piece of legislation. It is not a party measure. It will make a valuable contribution to the improvement of housing, to urban regeneration and industrial improvement, and to the protection of the environment. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 290.

Division No. 60] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ron Davies and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John

Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Francis Maude.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

HOUSING AND PLANNING BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Housing and Planning Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act and any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment;

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums received by the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(3) the payment out of or into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.

—[Mr. John Patten.]

10.15 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): In opposing the money resolution, I should like to say that it is to be hoped that the Minister who replied to the previous debate does a better job at solving crime than he does for housing. His deplorable attitude in the 20 or 25 minutes of winding

up offered no comfort whatever to the millions of families who look to this place for some relief from the conditions in which they live.

No fewer than 1·25 million houses are defined as unfit to live in and more than 2·5 million homes suffer some form of damp. That means that the House, people in the Strangers' Gallery and those who are reading speeches should have heard something from the Government to show that they take account of the suffering of more than 4 million households, but we heard nothing from the Dispatch Box about alleviating the problem.

A line in the 1983 Conservative party manifesto ran:

"Our goal is to make Britain the best-housed nation in Europe".

That is laughable in 1986. The Government spend less —about one third—as a proportion of national income than any other Common Market nation on housing. Seven years of this Government have produced real cuts in housing expenditure of two thirds. For every £1 spent in 1979, 20p is now spent on public sector housing. One of the consequences is that 400,000 building workers— skilled chippies, plumbers, bricklayers and electricians —are condemned to life on the dole when they could be repairing, modernising and improving the decaying housing stock of cities such as Coventry.

At current rates of house building, it is estimated that it will take until 2950 to replace the current housing stock. Nobody alive today will see that. Many generations will have to live in squalor if the Government's record is maintained. *[Interruption.]* I sat through the majority of six hours of the previous debate to make statements like that. According to Government definitions, Coventry has 1,000 houses that are unfit for human habitation and another 6,000 houses which lack one or more of the basic amenities—hot and cold running water, an inside toilet, a bath or a shower. We have 14,000 houses that need at least £4,000 spent on them to bring them up to an acceptable standard. Workers and their families in Coventry might have had an illusion of an expectation that the Bill and the money resolution would have offered some amelioration for one in six in the city.

The statistics involving workers in the west midlands are equally worthy of mention. No fewer than 450,000 houses in the west midlands are deemed unsatisfactory for present-day requirements and another 100,000 are in serious disrepair. Just before Christmas, a group of eminent medical experts and officials from the area health authority in Coventry brought out a weighty document called "The Health of Coventry". Time does not permit me to give the details of that report, but one of its central contentions is that to protect, develop and enhance the health of working people, a basic requirement is a decent house to live in.

According to the report, 402 families in Coventry are at serious risk because they need to be moved, but the council is unable to move them. In Coventry there are 5,000 houses without an inside toilet. There are 2,428 families—that means kids as well—do not have a bath or a shower. Some 1,266 people share a bath and 3,500 Coventry citizens cannot expect to have a hot water supply. *[Interruption.]*

These facts seem to make Conservative Members laugh. I would like to inform you, Mr. Speaker, as you were not in the Chair earlier, that the House heard a speech from the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) in which, apart from gaining concessions from the Minister with regard to cheaper methods of selling off houses under clauses 4 and 5, he made an interesting revelation about his colleagues seated around him. He said he was surrounded by chartered accountants.

The chartered surveyors on the Tory Benches have no experience of the kind of problems that I hear in my constituency. People come to me weekly and fortnightly with their problems. For example, a young woman with two children under the age of five, living on the third floor of a council block, told me that she had to go down to the garden to use an outside toilet. She pleaded with me to get the council to install an inside toilet, as when her kids are ill they become sicker by going out into the wind and the rain. When I write to Coventry city council, all that I receive back are letters from the housing department saying that there is no prospect of installing an inside toilet for at least 30 or 40 years.

In the face of that, Conservative Members wonder why some Labour Members get angry about the situation.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman feels very strongly about what he is saying. Can he explain why, apart from the Opposition Front Bench, there are just two of his colleagues in the House? Is it because they do not share his concern about the matter?

Mr. Nellist: Apart from the fact that the hon. Gentleman cannot count, my remarks are——

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is any of this relevant to the money resolution?

Mr. Speaker: If it was not relevant, I would have stopped the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist).

Mr. Nellist: The central point about the money resolution is that it gives money and authority to the Government to fulfil and enact the Bill.

The central clause in the Bill, clause 5, deals with increasing council house sales—both individually, by increasing the amount of discounts and shortening the time before that discount is applied, and collectively, by selling off blocks and estates. As I mentioned earlier in an interjection, one of my constituents in Stoke Aldermoor remarked to me on Friday evening that were the Government to get away with selling off council houses and place pressure on local authorities like Coventry to sell off chunks of estates, there would, in the midlands, be islands of affluence inside seas of effluent.

If the Bill was to be carried through Committee and the rest of the stages in the House, why has there been no recognition tonight from Conservative Members of those people in greatest need? Why have we not heard any statistics about the people on council house waiting lists whom the selling off of council homes condemns to further years of waiting before they can get a transfer or an application granted for a house or flat? When local authorities sell houses, those in greatest need, those who have been on waiting lists for many years, see their chances of a flat or a house receding. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member deserves a fair hearing. All the chit-chat on the Back Benches is very unseemly.

Mr. Nellist: Those people who come to see me in my surgeries with housing questions come about basic

[Mr. Nellist]

problems. For example, some people want to move quickly as they have already waited six or seven years and others would like to have an inside toilet. If we pass the money resolution to give authority and effect to the Bill, those people will be ditched. Selling council houses reduces local authority housing stock and condemns to an even longer wait those in greatest need of public sector housing.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nellist: I shall give way in a minute.

I attempted during the speeches of the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) and the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to ask a question on behalf of the thousands of tenants whom I represent: if the Government complete the Bill's plans and encourage councils to sell more local authority houses to their occupants and to private developers, collectively or individually, what happens to those who cannot afford to buy, or do not wish to buy? What happens to those who want to remain as tenants? What happens to the debt charges of £200 million in Coventry which lie on the backs of local authority tenants? If the number of houses and flats in Coventry is reduced from 25,000 to 20,000 or 15,000, the proportion of debt charges that must be serviced by rent increases to be paid by the tenants who are left will grow year by year.

As I have had no answer from the Minister, I give way to the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames).

Mr. Soames: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify a small point? Is it not now official Labour party policy to allow the sale of council houses?

Mr. Nellist: When my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) was specifically asked by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) whether a future Labour Government would take back into local authority ownership from tenants the houses that had been bought, my hon. Friend gave the unequivocal and categorical answer that a future Labour Government would make no attempt to repossess those houses. The hon. Member for Crawley may want me to expand on that point. The theme I am trying to develop is that those most in need of local authority housing do not gain any benefit from the sale of council houses. They would gain a benefit by massively expanding public sector building, as councils such as Liverpool have attempted to do in the past two years. I hope that a future Labour Government will take account of that fact. I hope that the Labour party will initiate these measures when it takes office in the next months or year or so.

When the hon. Member for Eastbourne referred to the chartered surveyors and the estate agents who sat on the Tory Benches, it became obvious that the Tories mainly supported the Bill not because it gave people a rational, reasonable choice on the type of home they could have but because it was in the narrow interests of profit—the interests of the builders, speculators and others who hoped to take a slice of the £75 billion public sector housing which the Government intend piece by piece to continue to privatise.

Ministers talk not about homes and houses but about units. They talk not about improving houses but about recoverable loans. How can they understand what it is like to live in damp, inadequate housing when they are led by a Prime Minister who had a house built by Barratt for £400,000 in Dulwich? They do not comprehend what it is like to live in the inner cities.

What has Coventry got out of the Bill? Absolutely nothing. We have had six or seven years of seeing our money for housing cut time and time again. In 1979, we were given £13 million by the Tories for repair, renovation and new build but this year, in cash terms, that has fallen to £7·2 million. In real terms, our city has lost £80 million over the past six or seven years. There are 3,000 or 4,000 building workers who could be working to repair buildings in the area represented by myself and other Labour Members, if the money were given back to Coventry. There are 8,000 people who desperately need a place in a council house or flat but have no opportunity to obtain it. There are people who live in overcrowded conditions, but the Government would rather spend £10 billion on Trident and sell chunks of our manufacturing industry to the Americans.

The money resolution and the Bill seek to destroy everything that local authorities have built up in public housing. They seek to denigrate and attack those local authorities such as Lambeth and Liverpool that have tried to swim against the tide and maintain or extend their housing stock. The money resolution and the Bill seek to sell the fallacy that one can choose to buy a house, but this is done on the back of increased rents for council house tenants. They seek to increase the profits of the Wimpeys, Laings and Barratts, which wish like sharks to get in on the buying up of council estates, with no regard to those who cannot afford to move out or to buy the houses that they intend to improve.

I urge that the money resolution be not passed and that authority be not given to the Government to act upon it. Let a report of the debate be made available to working-class people throughout the country so that the Government are chucked out of office as soon as possible.

10.30 pm

The Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction (Mr. John Patten): I make a surprise appearance at the Dispatch Box. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on his ingenuity in finding something to raise on the money resolution. However, to my mind he has not addressed the terms of the resolution as drafted. The resolution would have been drafted in the same terms if the Bill had included all the provisions which the Opposition wanted to see and none of things about which they complained.

The essence of the resolution is that it is purely qualitative. It does not require any expenditure to be incurred, nor does it impose any limit on expenditure. Those matters will be dealt with by the House when Estimates and cash limits are under consideration. The Explanatory and Financial Memorandum sets out accurately and absolutely what we expect the effects on expenditure to be. Accordingly, I commend the money resolution to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Housing and Planning Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act and any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment;

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums received by the Secretary of State under the Act; and

(3) the payment out of or into the Consolidated Fund or the National Loans Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.

Waste (Sea Disposal)

10.31 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8805/85, a proposal for a Directive on the disposal of non-radioactive waste se at sea; recognises the importance rightly attached by Her Majesty's Government to the protection of the marine environment; considers nevertheless that sea disposal may represent the best practicable environmental option for certain wastes; notes the existence of well-established and effective international conventions in this field; and is therefore not convinced that the adoption of this Community instrument is an essential element of environmental protection.

I very much welcome this opportunity of setting out the Government's view of the important proposal which is contained in European Community document No. 8805/85. It is an important topic and it is good that the House should have an opportunity to discuss it generally, rather than, as so often, concern itself only with the radioactive issues. The Government attach great importance to the protection of the marine environment, and last year part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 increased our duties and powers to protect the sea and its living resources.

We cannot issue any licence for sea disposal of waste without having regard to the marine environment, the living resources it supports and human health. We must prevent interference with legitimate uses of the sea, of which fishing and recreation are obvious examples. Furthermore, the Act requires Ministers to consider at all times the practical availability of alternative disposal methods.

We are aided in carrying out the obvious duties which are laid upon us because in London we have the secretariats of the two key conventions on sea disposal, both of which play a major part in defending the sea. The United Kingdom is a founder member of the London dumping convention and the Oslo convention, and we have played an active role in the scientific work of both conventions. They have been successful because they have maintained a rigorously scientific approach to their work, which determines which substances may not be disposed of at sea and those which demand special care.

The conventions' scientific work, their secretariats and the experts on which they draw provide a base for our decisions under domestic legislation. That is why the UK can take great care to ensure that each application for a licence to dispose of waste at sea is critically considered against the criteria that are set by the conventions for the protection of the marine environment. This is done through the considerable resources which we devote to our effort, especially through our fisheries laboratories at Lowestoft, Burnham-on-Crouch, Aberdeen and elsewhere.

The sea may be the best practicable environmental option for certain types of waste, but we need to satisfy ourselves on each and every occasion that that is the case.

The demands of employment do not allow us to treat these matters easily or without counting the cost. Industrial societies create waste. Waste must be dumped in the sea or on the land. Restrictions on waste disposal cost money and jobs. Necessary restrictions must be paid for, and paid for with a will, but we in this House must not ask others to bear unnecessary restrictions, for it is not we who pay the cost or lose the jobs. It is against the background of effective control, accepted and supported by every member of the European Community with a coastline, that we must consider the proposal before the House tonight.

We have a system which works. It has meant that all the members of the European Community — save Luxembourg, which does not have a direct interest in this issue—are able to see that the methods by which they control dumping at sea are kept clearly in line with the criteria produced by the two conventions.

Now we have a suggestion for a change. These proposals call, first, for harmonisation. Nobody will say that I am not in favour of harmonisation. I begin by believing that it is better for us to do things together in Europe and to adopt similar standards. But harmonisation is not an end in itself, and the trouble with these proposals is that they would treat totally different places as if they were the same. They would treat the Atlantic ocean in the same way as they would treat the Mediterranean sea, and that is clearly wrong.

We see how wrong it is by twisting the issue round the other way and asking what would happen if we insisted that measures suitable for the open and fast-flowing waters of the Atlantic and North sea should be the only measures applied to protect the landlocked and tideless Mediterranean. Those living along the Mediterranean coast would complain, saying, "Your situation is entirely different from ours. We have none of the natural cleaning properties that you have. We must deal with a totally different position, so we must have different ways of doing that."

In reverse, that is what the Commission suggests we do here. It suggests that we have a regimen which meets the needs of the Mediterranean and is applied to a totally different circumstance in the Atlantic and North sea.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Some of the adjacent riparian states — for example, France, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands—agree with this proposal. How can the argument that the right hon. Gentleman has adduced be valid if it is not accepted by countries in the same position on either side of the North sea which have no direct interest in the Mediterranean-type origins of a directive such as this?

Mr. Gummer: Even so enthusiastic a supporter of the European Community as I can conceive of a situation in which Britain is right and they are wrong. This is such a situation. We have been more directly involved in the operation of the London dumping convention and in the use of the materials and information that has been put before us. We have taken, and continue to take, a lead in this area. Our record should not be condemned by others. We are saying that the present system works satisfactorily and that it need not become part of a European directive. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that other member states will go along with it, because they believe it to be perfectly reasonable. I hope that I can persuade hon. Members that their argument is wrong.

First, it is wrong to try to harmonise two different seas. That is why we have two conventions. Secondly, if we tried to do that, it would be disadvantageous to EC countries as against others, because it would mean that we were setting an unnecessary limit on ourselves while

others would not do so. We would have the disadvantage that non-EC countries did not meet the requirements, for they saw no reason to do it, and the disadvantage of an uncompetitive position. Therefore, it is not true that we must harmonise to enhance competitiveness, which is often the argument put forward. It does not apply here.

However, it might be said that it would be a good idea in any case for the Community to play a greater role than it does now. I believe that the Community should take urgent action in many areas; I want it to become more involved in matters in which it could do extremely well. But it is peculiar that it should decide that this is the area, where there is already adequate and effective international co-operation, in which it should operate. It is the area where the EC is least needed.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I understand my hon. Friend's argument. Annex I substances cannot be laid at sea because they are prohibited on or under the seabed. Technology is beginning to move on, and it may be that later a drilling string will allow some of that material to be laid down a drill string. If we harmonised throughout Europe, does my right hon. Friend foresee the possibility that this will be precluded; but if it is on the basis that it be laid on the seabed only or prohibited from there, I do not want to see the other one excluded. What is my right hon. Friend's interpretation?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend may be right. If we accepted the directive in its present form, several possible technical changes may be denied to us. I wonder whether my hon. Friend has noticed the other great difficulty before us. The directive contains nothing which would enable a distinction to be made between the waste dumped containing a minimal amount of a prohibited substance and the waste dumped being largely composed of a prohibited substance. That would be an intolerable method of operation. It means that if there are the merest trace elements, which would have been perfectly safe to lay under the previous conventions and under the most stringent conditions imposed by the scientists, it would be impossible to do so under this proposal because the operation is not as flexible as it was before.

That position has occurred because—I put this as delicately as I can—some people have been in the business of control for a long time, and have learnt through long experience the difficulties and advantages of some methods of operation. The EC is a newcomer, and its proposals for dealing with the matter have not learnt the lessons that have been learnt over a long time by those who have worked under the London dumping convention and the Oslo convention.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is the Minister satisfied that the present conventions and legislation have the power to maintain the cleanliness of the seas round Scotland, especially its islands and west coast, which is an especially fine area for the development of fish farming? Is he satisfied that the present conventions and legislation will maintain that pollution-free area for fish farms and other activities?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows that I am particularly interested in that subject and take the issue seriously. I believe that we have got both the powers and the information to ensure that pollution does not endanger fish farming in that area. If we did not have the powers, or if further changes in the law were necessary, we have all the information and all the scientific advice from our present arrangements and we would not benefit from the proposals before us. That is the point. If I thought that the proposals would help us, I would follow my natural reaction and say that this would be better done on a European level, but I do not believe that to be so.

I do not believe that the proposals are based upon the rigorously argued scientific basis which we have come to expect from the two conventions. To give a second example, it says in the proposal that there should be a 50 per cent. reduction in the sea disposal of certain kinds of waste. That is to take for granted the view that sea disposal is intrinsically less desirable than land disposal. If I were very polite, I would say that that was at least an arguable proposition. In any event, it is certainly not a proposition on which to base an entire regime.

Article 10 would impose a freeze and then a 50 per cent. reduction over five years in the quantities of certain kinds of waste for sea disposal. The definition is so all embracing that significant quantities of sewage sludge, liquid industrial waste and dredged spoil which are being perfectly safely disposed of at the moment under the criteria agreed internationally would have to be spread about on the land,. We have to get rid of it somewhere. If we do not put it in the sea we have to put it on the land.

All that is in the face of serious scientific evidence that less than 5 per cent. of the metals in the North sea arise from sea disposal, while the atmosphere and rivers between them contribute up to 90 per cent. So the Commission's proposal is ill based scientifically and very costly and it would be unlikely to achieve any appreciable improvement in the marine environment. It does not have any of the advantages which one would look for either to protect the marine environment for fish farming round Scotland or to make a further quantum step in the improvement of the sea around our shores.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I have followed the Minister's argument. Can he tell us what the Government's response is to the proposals of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution which in its tenth report recommended:

> "The Government should respond positively to the initiatives of the Federal German Government and the Commission of the European Communities concerning the North sea."

Obviously I cannot go through all the recommendations, but in general terms they said that we are not doing enough, that the future health of the North sea cannot be assured if present processes increase and that the existing regime is not sufficient to protect the environment.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman rightly says that we cannot go through each of the detailed recommendations. He might note that in some cases what we are doing or have agreed to do is better than is offered in the proposals under discussion. That is a problem we share. It is not that we could not argue about whether we are doing all the things that the Royal Commission has proposed, for there are obvious differences between us on that, but we are much more able to do something under the regimen that we have than under the proposals that the Commission has put before us. We could continue to argue as to whether we are doing enough. That is the right kind of tension. But what is proposed does not advance the hon. Gentleman's case. If we were to do what is proposed under the instrument, we would buy the 50 per cent. reduction

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at the price of increased environmental pollution on land. The Commission's proposal does not seem even to begin to weigh the land and sea disposal options against one another, either generally or on the basis of specific scientific criteria, environmental impact, cost, or amenity.

Many right hon. and hon. Members will want to raise points of concern, but I emphasise again that the Government stand firm in their determination to protect the marine environment. If we had thought that this proposal would be helpful and that it was a further step towards the adoption of a common view by all sides of the House, we should have approached it in an entirely different way. However, the Government believe that it is not helpful. This country has strengthened its domestic legislation on sea disposal. We continue to meet our international obligations and we devote considerable resources to evaluating the effects of sea disposal according to scientific criteria. If we thought that we could improve upon that record by supporting the proposals, we should do so. However, we believe the opposite to be the case, that there is no obvious net environmental gain and that there are obvious gross costs—not least in jobs. We do not believe, therefore, that this is a proper basis for Community action.

10.50 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): It may surprise the Minister of State to hear that I have a certain sympathy for some of his points, but I do not share his complacency. He appears to adopt the attitude that all is well and that this country has an excellent record. That is not so. It is hard to find anybody, either on the Opposition Benches or in Europe, who shares the Minister's attitude. He is also complacent about the seas around these shores. My hon Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has already referred to the fact that there is concern in the Western Isles of Scotland. The 1984 Bremen conference said:

> "The survival clock of the North sea points to five minutes to midnight. In coastal areas entire eco-systems are already at the brink of extinction or reduced in extent. Birds and mammals are in danger of reduction in numbers and health."

I do not believe that that accords with the Minister's description.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) pointed out that in its tenth report the Royal Commission, which is an independent adviser to this Parliament, provided a very long roll-call of deficiencies in our protection of the marine environment. Therefore, I do not share the Minister's complacency, but I share some of his worries about European Community document No. 8805/85. Its objective is worthy and it deserves to be successful but it requires very close scrutiny by Parliament. The Commission has, I suggest, produced a premature document that contains gaps. I want to draw attention to some of them.

The Government need to adopt a very much stronger policy on marine environment. I represent a constituency that borders the North sea. It has a large fishing industry, beautiful beaches and a large seafaring population. I am therefore very conscious of the dangers of sea pollution, especially of North sea pollution. Our European neighbours refer to us as the "bad neighbour" of Europe. That worries me because, as well as being offensive it is true. I do not think that the Minister has helped us to resolve that problem.

One has only to look at the facts. We debated this at great length when discussing part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, which replaced the Dumping at Sea Act 1974. It is true that the United Kingdom dumps 99 per cent. of sewage sludge in Europe in the sea. It is true that 70 per cent. of industrial waste dumped in the North sea is produced by the United Kingdom. It is true that we are the second largest dumper of liquid waste and sludge. It is not a very enviable record.

As the Minister said, there are already conventions the aim of which is to protect the North sea. I took a count and found that there are 13 conventions, 11 EEC directives and 17 national laws. Those add up, as I hope I have shown, not to a strength but to a weakness. It could be argued that to combine all those conventions, directives and laws into one would be a step forward. I see the logic in that. Just as air pollution recognises no national boundaries, so it is with the maritime regime. The real question is whether the logic is correct. I see an immediate plus in that if we did have a directive it would mean that rules would be laid down which, as a long stop, would be enforceable in the European Court. That power does not exist at present. I find it difficult to agree with the prime justification made by the European Commission for the new directive. As I understand it, the rationale is twofold; first, to harmonise the marine pollution controls in each of the relevant seas, and secondly, to ensure that there is no unfair barrier to trade and industry.

I share the Minister's point of view. I am not sure whether the values and standards applicable in the Mediterranean are applicable to the North sea or whether what may be appropriate to the Baltic is appropriate to the Atlantic. I think that there are different problems, and it may be that they are better treated separately.

There is another point of weakness in the directive. In regard to the North sea—and this applies equally to the Mediterranean—one of the principal riparian countries, Norway, is not a member of the EEC. Therefore, it may well be—I suspect that it is—better to try to deal with pollution of the North sea through the Oslo convention, to which the Norwegians are signatories, than to try to do this through EEC directive.

Therefore, I have worries about this mania for harmonisation. I suspect that, although the intentions of the Bill may be good, the net product is that it may be premature and a setback to the marine environment protection policy.

One of the key points in the directive is to make incineration at sea illegal in 1990 or some time thereafter. I agree with the main thrust of that approach. There are great dangers in the practice of marine incineration and in monitoring. It is almost as if this were being swept under the carpet so that, because we cannot see it, we are not too worried about it. I am also concerned about the alternative. The Minister—and I think that he is wrong—said that waste can be disposed of in one of two ways, on land or at sea. I remind him that it can also be recycled. We should give more attention to that option. In other respects, the Minister is correct. If we do not treat waste at sea, we may have to treat it on land. The hazardous waste inspectorate of the Department in its first report last year stressed that there is only limited land use capacity in the United Kingdom. The directive recognises the problem, because

it requires member states to promote alternative land-based methods of disposal. We are entitled to ask the Government what they are doing and what they will do about that. The Government gave their response to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology in April 1985. Their response was inadequate. They said:

"The Government recognises the importance of ensuring that specialist disposal facilities are available. That this must primarily be a task for industry itself and at present the Government sees no case to support these financially, nor to direct waste to them."

That free market approach will no longer be appropriate if we ban incineration at sea. If the directive and the orders are to be effective, tighter controls over the incineration of waste at sea must be accompanied by Government action to ensure the availability of adequate alternative facilities.

Sir Trevor Skeet: We have the worry in the North se that to drill, drilling mud is required. How would the hon. Gentleman deal with that? Would he have it all brought ashore or would he allow dumping? Does he regard that matter as one of the anomalies that must be dealt with?

Dr. Clark: I am sure how that point relates to incineration at sea, but it is an anomaly that should be mentioned. We are responsible for 90 per cent. of that activity in the North sea. It is a major problem which is not faced up to in the directive. That is why I am lukewarm about the directive.

Even if the proposals on incineration at sea are not implemented there is an urgent need for the Government to turn away from their free market approach to the treatment of waste on land. That is essential. I hope that the Minister will feel able to say something about that when he replies.

The second proviso to which the Minister referred related to the 10 per cent. reduction for five consecutive years from 1990. The directive states:

"Member States shall reduce each year the quantities of waste authorised to be dumped by 10 per cent. of the quantity authorised in 1989 in the case of waste or other materials listed in Annex II, points 1, 2, 3 and 5."

Does that mean materials covered by annex II, or does it apply to other general waste?

I have spoken to many people outside the House who are knowledgeable about the problem and the impression seems to be that that point applies to all materials. Does it apply to sewage sludge, colliery waste and dredgings? It is important that the House and those people involved in the industry should have an answer to that question tonight. Is solid colliery waste—I am not talking about tailings—covered by that article? That point is of great interest to many people.

My next point relates to the enforcement and monitoring of the dumping. That is covered by article 12. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issues the licences and monitors the position. There is evidence that illegal dumping takes place in the North sea. I shall cite a specific case, of which I know the Minister is aware because we have corresponded about it. Immediately before Christmas fishermen in my constituency lost more than £500 worth of nets when they were destroyed by "illegally dumped colliery waste" in the Minister's words. Checks on legitimate authorised vessels dumping waste have yielded no clues. As waste was indisputably on top of the nets, there are two possibilities—an authorised vessel located the dumping ground incorrectly, or unauthorised vessels were dumping waste. The Minister has been studying this and other cases, so could he comment on that? Is he satisfied that the key to the control of dumping depend on monitoring and the ability of authorised vessels to know precisely where they are? Is he satisfied that authorised vessels have the necessary instruments to locate their precise positions? For example, have they depth plotters? There are suggestions that those vessels do not have sophisticated location finders.

It is often said along the coast that unauthorised dumping takes place at dumping sites at dusk and in the dark. Could the Minister set in motion an investigation about that? Will he verify whether that is the case? Perhaps he could ask the coastguards, who will have information about that.

Finally, is the Minister satisfied that there are sufficient coastguards and other officials to monitor dumping? As the Minister knows, since the closure of the Tees station, the Tyne station covered by coastguards stretches from Berwick in the north to Scarborough in the south. The Government have made serious cuts in personnel. Has that applied to coastguards? It has been applied to Customs men and, recently, at least one foreign vessel on the Tyne, which our Dutch colleagues informed us was well known for running drugs, was left unchecked simply because the Customs men were pulled off as there was no overtime pay for them. Fortunately, that has been put right, but I suspect that what applies to customs men also applies to coastguards.

Our record on the sea, especially the North sea, is certainly lamentable, and that opinion is shared by virtually all the experts who have examined it. We need to do more. This directive needs careful analysis before we endorse it. I certainly agree with its sentiments and objectives, but too many questions are unanswered. I would prefer to perfect the directive and meanwhile to work under the Oslo and London Dumping Convention to ensure that the sea is protected. I urge the Government to convert to the marine environment, just as the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has given the lead to the Department of Environment on countryside matters.

11.8 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): In two interventions during the Minister's speech I made it clear that the Liberal party opposes the wording of the motion. It states that the House

"notes the existence of well-established and effective international conventions . . . and is therefore not convinced that the adoption of this Community instrument is an essential element of environmental protection."

The Minister laid his cards before us. He said that that was not the appropriate method, that we must say that our European Community colleagues who are prepared to endorse the directive are wrong, that we have sufficient mechanisms through other international conventions and that we would prefer to follow them.

There is, however, good general support—I have shown, in part, where it comes from—for the view that we are not doing a good enough job. As I recall, the House has not yet had the opportunity, which I anticipate it will have later this year, to debate the most recent report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. Last year we had a good debate on the 10th report and the 11th report

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was produced at the end of 1985. That report was specifically on the subject of "Managing Waste: The Duty of Care".

I have not heard anybody question the expertise, experience or authority of the Royal Commission and paragraph 13(2) of its report says:

"In the waste management context we reiterate the comment in the Tenth Report that the United Kingdom should play a more positive role in the development of Europeam Community environmental policy."

If one reads the rest of the conclusions and recommendations and ties them back to the conclusions and recommendations of the 10th report, with which the House is probably more familiar as it has been debated and followed up in more detail, one sees that the Royal Commission is clear that in general we should take a much more positive attitude. There are exceptions to that, and I share the view of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and the Minister that it is not a blanket endorsement that everything proposed is wonderful. There are comments in the Report which should act as a trigger to encourage the Minister to look more positively at the directive. Paragraph 12.28 has two sentences of that sort. The first is:

"In most industrialised countries higher standards of waste management are being demanded."

and the second is:

"waste management must not remain the Cinderella of government and industry."

I start from the premise that it is the general view of the experts that we are lagging behind and are not doing enough, in spite of the intention to do better than we have in the past.

The Minister will be aware that his Department receives, on a regular basis, a considerable number of inquiries on this subject through parliamentary questions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Pre-eminent among my colleagues in asking such questions is my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who I note has asked several such questions. My research assistant found regular inquiries on this subject which demonstrate a regular level of interest and concern. Therefore, I understand and expect the Minister to say that he feels pressurised on this matter within his own Department and to be aware of a feeling that we could do much more.

I would hope that it is the Government's policy, whether dealing with disposal of waste at sea or on land, that we should be aiming towards a society in which there is zero waste and where we actually reprocess all our waste. For example, we could use sewage waste as fertiliser. Heavy metals can be taken out of waste. Some of the waste to which this directive addresses itself is waste which has heavy metal components. We should be working towards the sustainable society, in which there is zero waste.

The directive encourages us to use our waste more effectively. It is important to point out one or two areas where I would have hoped that the Government could have been more positive. If I had to justify my participation in the debate I could do so easily, because the Thames water authority, which is responsible for the city and which is particularly relevant to a riverside constituency such as mine, dumps 5 million tonnes of sewage sludge waste each year nearer to the area of the hon. Member for South Shields.

As we are the major exporters of sludge and slurry into the North sea, we have the prime responsibility. The Minister will no doubt agree that we are the country most likely to be most affected by the directive. No doubt, he feels that therefore we have the pre-eminent interest in not taking anything that the European Community as a whole might accept as readily as others because if affects our interest most. I accept that.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that many countries export all kinds of things through pipelines into the North sea. We have taken the view that the kind of sludge that we put into the sea is a far better way to dispose of the waste. That means that regulations such as this fall on us in a different way from others, even though our pollution may be little, and theirs considerable.

Mr. Hughes: I accept that entirely. However, this is little like the debates that we have with Department of the Environment Ministers about acid rain. We have a particular responsibility and start from a particular involvement, which should give us a particular keenness to try to co-operate as much as possible, because of the importance of trying to have European standards on such important matters as environmental pollution, which is not limited to national boundaries and of moving towards harmonisation where that is possible. For example, the Government should tell the House that they are prepared to look at ways to reduce the amount of heavy metal in sludge, and thus the pollution caused by sludge, and thereby reduce the damage to the environment.

In spite of the excitement my speech is causing the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), shown by the way that he is waving around some papers, I shall continue to make one or two points.

I fear that, unless the Minister shows that he is proposing to be more positive than he was in his first speech, in which he went against the international trend by holding out—uniquely—against the proposal for a directive, there is a potential harm to us. There is a concession that I would make from my purist position, and it is one that the Royal Commission made in its turn. It is on the subject of a proposal to phase out incineration as suggested in the directive, which may not be both easy or practicable in the short term. There is a case in the immediate future for incineration being an immediate method of getting rid of nasty waste. That does not mean to say that it should not be far more severely controlled. I hope that, if the Minister is praying in aid those who say that we cannot get rid of incineration at sea immediately, he will at best say what further controls we should impose.

Is it the Minister's view, and thus a suggestion that he could make, that if we were to agree to a directive, although not exactly in these terms, we should have quality objectives and limits on pollution at sea, rather than quantity conditions and limits? That may be a more acceptable way in which to judge, and it could be tested on the pollution of fish and marine stock, as well as on things that are washed up on the shore.

It may be thought that this is a matter of concern only to industry and those directly concerned with operations at sea, whether oil exploration, fishing or the like. That

is not the case. I have had much correspondence, of which I have brought only one example. It comes from a colleague in Brighton, who says that there is a major campaign—I presume, on a non-party basis, because it is proposed by the Keep Britain Tidy group—trying to deal with the pollution that gets washed up on Brighton's beaches, including lethal chemical containers and so on. There is great concern that we should be doing something to deal with pollution at sea.

I regret that the Government have said that they know better than anybody else, that they are satisfied that what they are doing is adequate, and that they can afford to be pretty, if not very, complacent. I do not find that attitude satisfactory. People who live around our shores or who know the facts about pollution would not either. The Royal Commission does not find it satisfactory and I hope that the Minister will say that the Government are prepared to be much more positive towards the directive than we have heard them be so far.

11.19 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I share the reservations that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) expressed. However, I welcome any attempt to reduce marine pollution around the United Kingdom. I shall concentrate on the interests of the inshore fishing industry and the fish farming industry. Both must be protected by measures that help reduce marine pollution.

Scotland has witnessed some improvement in the control of pollution. We now have salmon in the Clyde again, largely as a result of the sustained efforts of the Clyde purification board and Strathclyde regional council. Fish farming and the fishing industry are important to the Scottish economy, especially to rural maritime communities. They need clean seas, rivers and sea lochs. One of the reasons why fish farming is so successful, especially on the west coast of Scotland, the Western Isles and in Orkney, is the cleanliness of the waters. It is essential that they remain pollution free.

I recently visited a salmon farm in Orkney run by a Norwegian couple. It is a successful enterprise, aided by the Highlands and Islands Development Board, which was set up by a Labour Government, because the area is so pleasantly free of marine pollution. Salmon is important to the Scottish economy. Apart from being part of our national heritage, it is important to our tourist industry. That is why I welcome the Salmon Bill, which has just completed its passage through the other place.

The salmon requires clean rivers and regulations which control the activities of salmon fishermen, legal and illegal. We need a cluster of conventions and marine pollution control regulations which enable both industries to develop.

The proposal presents formidable problems for local and central Government. In Scotland, the regional authorities have a major responsibility in terms of sewage disposal. For example, Strathclyde regional council has an important role to play. Two vessels are in constant operation taking sewage sludge out into the Firth of Clyde. How will that council be affected by the proposal? The region has major plans, which are at an advanced stage, to develop a large sewage disposal plant close to my constituency. How will it be affected by the proposal? The plant is to be built in the constituency of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley), but it will involve my constituents as well. A sewage outlet pipe will extend into the Firth of Clyde. If Strathclyde has to make major changes in the next decade or so, will it receive EEC finance to change its methods of sewage sludge disposal? That is an important question for my regional council to consider.

My next question concerns prohibition on the disposal of oil-based drilling mounts and oil from drill cuttings. As the Government rightly say in the explanatory memorandum, prohibition would present formidable problems for oil exploration activities in the North sea and for those activities that are taking place off the west coast of Scotland. How will they be affected by this rather odd draft Community instrument? That industry is important to the economy not only of Scotland but of the United Kingdom as a whole. It is essential that oil exploration activities are not too severely constrained. I know that this matter is not within the province of the Minister of State, but I seek some reassurance.

No mention is made of the debris scattered on the seabed by the more reckless and disreputable offshore operators and offshore vessels. That debris does a great deal of damage to the fishermen's nets. The present legislation does not deal effectively with that menace.

I welcome the concern of the EEC and of other north Atlantic nations about marine pollution, which must be reduced. However, I have serious reservations about this draft instrument.

11.28 pm

Mr. Gummer: I should like to answer some of the points raised in this interesting debate. I am pleased that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and I are of one mind on the main thrust of our discussion on this proposal. It is always possible to say — the hon. Gentleman is right to press me on this—that we should do more.

I find it difficult to accept the charge of complacency, because the hon. Member for South Shields referred to criticisms of the Government which antedated the changes we made in the legislation we passed last year. The hon. Gentleman suggested that we were not aware of the improvements that we want to make. We have made the legislative changes that will help very much in that direction. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to the return of salmon to the Clyde. There are examples of improvements around the British coast. That is not to say that we do not need to do much more. Equally, it cannot be said that we should have attracted the opprobrium of the Bremen conference. However, the conference delegates did not attack us—they complained about particular trouble spots in the eastern North sea off the German coast where problems were caused by discharges from continental Europe, not from the United Kindom.

When the conference delegates were talking about the problems of the North sea, far from attacking the United Kingdom Government they were attacking the Governments of continental Europe — the very Governments that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow suggested could lead the way. That is not the case. He was right to say that much more could be done, and we are considering many possibilities. For example, on the problem of sludge from drilling, we now use non-toxic materials that have improved the position. That is

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part of the operation that we are seeking to carry out. We are not saying that it is always wrong to use those substances, but that they should be made safe to use.

The problem is ours because we do a great deal of the drilling in the area and therefore we are responsible for the use of those substances. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was right to suggest that that laid a special reponsibility on us.

The hon. Gentleman claimed that the attitude of a number of our friends in Europe was different from ours. The discussions have not yet taken place. Our soundings lead us to believe that a number of them do not support the proposal. I accept that some do, but I believe them to be wrong. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that there are many enthusiasts for the proposal.

The hon. Member for South Shields spoke of the United Kingdom's record on dumping. Although we dump sewage sludge, we go to considerable trouble to make it as safe as possible. We have spent much time, and there has been considerable experimentation trying to improve that. His point about the possible building in his neighbour's constituency is a case in point. It is an attempt to find a better way to deal with sludge. If that sludge shows trace elements of any of the metals mentioned in the annexe, it will come under this directive. The problems that I have outlined would then arise.

The question that the hon. Gentleman asked has not yet been discussed to any great extent. I cannot, therefore, give him a direct answer. It is a question to which I believe we should not address ourselves because the basis of the argument is faulty. It is wrong to apply the same regulations to quantities of sludge irrespective of the amount of those elements within it.

I am not ignoring the fact that we should try to remove those elements as far as possible, but to take about them as though there was a pure load of one dangerous substance is an odd way to approach the issue.

We account for less than 10 per cent. of the sea disposal of liquid industrial waste. The suggestion that Britain is the dirty neighbour is unjustified, although I am not saying that we cannot do better. If we put the facts before the House, we are accused of being complacent; if we do not, we appear to be not supporting those who, over the past few years, have made major improvements. Many of them are concerned with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and I am concerned that their work should be recognised.

The Commission rejected the concept of incineration at sea without any scientific advice. We believe that that option should be kept open and compared with other options. We must proceed with the best practical option while considering always whether there is not a better way in which to proceed. There are no grounds for saying, "This is the state of the art and we shall be unable to move forward." The Royal Commission on environmental pollution concluded in its eleventh report that marine incineration was a possibility under strict conditions and an acceptable option for the disposal of some wastes.

If the option is rejected completely, we shall have to dispose of the waste in another way, and there are circumstances in which incineration would be preferable. Until we reach the Nirvana to which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey pointed, when no waste is produced, we must keep all the options open. The hon. Gentleman's vision is a long way from realisation on any view of technology. I emphasise that we investigate all illegal dumping and I shall consider carefully all the issues raised by the hon. Member for South Shields that were directed to it. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to say more than that which I have set out in the letters I have written to him. We are continuing to undertake research in the areas to which he referred.

The hon. Member for South Shields asked to what the 50 per cent. reduction referred to specifically. It must refer to sewage sludge, dredged spoil and some industrial wastes, because they contain minute quantities of the substances that are the cause of concern.

Dr. David Clark: Does sewage sludge include colliery waste? Is any scientific investigation taking place into the effect of inert colliery waste on the marine environment? Many biologists have told me that colliery waste has no effect on that environment and the local fishermen in my constituency tell me that it causes no problems for them. I should like to know whether there is any scientific research taking place into the interaction between colliery waste and the marine environment.

Mr. Gummer: Monitoring is taking place. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it has been undertaken for 30 years or more. There are some problems of comparison and we are constantly seeking new means of dealing with the problem. Nothing has been found that would be remotely feasible or better environmentally. I have examined all the evidence carefully and I cannot counteract the evidence which the hon. Gentleman has brought to my attention. I am examining the matter closely, not least because of his interest and in recognition of his constituency interest.

I would say to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that, if there is more sludge to be dumped, the proposal that is before us will become more difficult to accept. If there are any trace elements, the terms of the proposal will be triggered.

There was a real distinction to be drawn between the way in which the arguments of the spokesmen for the Labour and Liberal parties were advanced. The hon. Member for South Shields, who spoke for the official Opposition, said that we as a nation should do more, and that I should do more, to ensure that the environment is protected from the disposal of waste. He then examined the proposal carefully in addressing the House and suggested that it could not reasonably be supported although he had respect for its aims. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, who spoke for the Liberal party, ignored the fundamental problems that would arise in his constituency if the proposal were implemented and argued that we should accept it. He suggested that marginally he would go along with it and that the Government should do likewise.

That is the sort of illogicality that we hear from the alliance Bench. It is suggested that we must support the proposal because it is concerned with conservation, irrespective of whether it is good, bad or indifferent conservation. At least the hon. Member for South Shields examined the proposal, applied it to the problem and asked whether it would work.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will support anything that comes out of the European

Commission on conservation just to show that he is on the side of conservation. He must accept that, from the conservation point of view, this proposal would not help.

We have good arrangements already. While we may be able to do better, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey must accept that the existing two conventions enable us to do all that he would like us to do. He may say that we are not doing enough, but this proposal would make no difference. All the possibilities already exist, and what is proposed would only make matters worse because it would restrict us.

The people of Bermondsey would have their sewage turned into sludge and put on the land. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that that would help them to enjoy the Kentish countryside on those days when he allows them to go into the country? This suggests that he favours anything of a conservation nature simply because it might gain an extra vote for the Liberal party. The hon. Gentleman's argument is in sharp contrast to that put by the official Opposition and by Conservative Members. We see yet again why the hon. Member for South Shields, rather than the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, represents the official Opposition.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8805/85, a proposal for a Directive on the disposal of non-radioactive waste at sea; recognises the importance rightly attached by Her Majesty's Government to the protection of the marine environment; considers nevertheless that sea disposal may represent the best practicable environmental option for certain wastes; notes the existence of well-established and effective international conventions in this field; and is therefore not convinced that the adoption of this Community instrument is an essential element of environmental protection.

PROTECTION OF MILITARY REMAINS BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Protection of Military Remains Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the provisions of that Act; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

Horton Hospital, Banbury

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important subject and I thank the Minister for the care that he has taken so far in dealing with the representations that I have made about the Horton hospital.

As both my parents have spent their working lives in the National Health Service—my father is a doctor and my mother a nurse—I have, naturally, always had an interest in the NHS, and since becoming the Member for Banbury I have taken a particular interest in the Horton general hospital. It is a first-class general hospital with well-qualified and highly motivated staff serving the medical needs of a wide catchment area stretching into Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

Any debate on the NHS is liable to become either a statement of statistics or an exercise in special pleading. I hope to do neither. Horton is a well run hospital. The local community has every reason to have confidence in the hospital's unit administrator, Dennis Baston, and his team. Whereas the average national daily cost per in-patient is £79, at Horton hospital it is only £66, and whereas the national average in-patient case cost is £577, at Horton it is £528.

Some people seek to give the impression that the NHS is in a state of constant decline, is starved of resources and has ever-shrinking staff numbers. In fact, the figures show that local health services have never had so many resources devoted to them. Revenue spending on health services in Oxfordshire has increased by 101·7 per cent. in cash terms since 1979, representing an increase in real terms of 13·2 per cent. That means that the Health Service in Oxfordshire has a budget 13·2 per cent. bigger than it was in 1979. Revenue spending on Horton general hospital has increased by 103·8 per cent. in cash terms since 1979, which represents an increase in real terms of 14·4 per cent.

During the past six years, about £2·25 million has been spent on new building works at the hospital, and during the next five years about £6,640,000 is planned to be spent on new building works. Since 1979, about £670,000 has been spent on new medical equipment at the hospital. There is no doubt that Horton general hospital is a more secure, better district hospital now than it was in 1979.

Against that background of consistent achievement in the NHS and consistent extra resources for the hospital, I raise my specific anxieties, because, despite the consistent improvement, many beds at the hospital are empty for want of nurses and some financial resources. The first legitimate anxiety relates to RAWP which, as my hon. Friend will know, is the formula by which resources are allocated from central Government to regional health authorities. There are good grounds for suggesting that Oxfordshire regional health authority is underfunded. As my hon. Friend will know, it is one of the fastest growing areas of population in Britain, yet although in 1977-78 the region was 7 per cent. above its RAWP target, it is now 3 per cent. below target. It would appear to have had a more negative movement than any other region. I do not understand why Oxfordshire regional health authority should be in that position. The region's budget may be underfunded, so, however hard it tries, it will have

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

difficulties in meeting all its commitments. At the end of the day, that means that in a good district general hospital beds are not being used as they should be.

In a letter to me last October, my hon. Friend the Minister acknowledged that Oxfordshire is not receiving its fair share of resources. He said:

"It is true to say that Oxford RHA receives 3 per cent. less than its fair share of the available resources, whereas in 1977-78 it received 7 per cent. more than its share."

What happened was that, just at the point when the region was on target to receive exactly its fair share, its relative need for health care increased because of rapid population growth. The target shifted. This had the effect of converting Oxfordshire health authority from an over-target region to an under-target region. In simple terms, that means that the regional health authority has insufficient funds for its means and is not receiving a fair share of the funds available.

I appreciate that, this year, Oxfordshire is receiving about £1·4 million of growth money from the Government to pay for better services. However, that entire sum may be swallowed by unexpected bills: £344,000 to cover Oxfordshire massive rates increase; £700,000 to pay for higher than expected wage awards; and £250,000 to pay for a new national agreement on ambulance men's pay. I simply ask: when will Oxfordshire again receive its fair share of central Government money?

Our second anxiety relates to the nurses that the district health authority can provide at the Horton. That is partly a consequence of the resources that the regional health authority can apply to the district and the district health authority can apply to the hospital. Recently, Oxfordshire health authority undertook a comprehensive review of nursing. That review is not yet completed, but its results so far demonstrate such low numbers of nurses at present on the wards as to give rise to great anxiety. It is neither fair, sensible nor acceptable to allow the numbers of nurses on wards and in the community to reach such levels that the staff who remain become demoralised It is unfair to the nurses and to the patients. I fully appreciate that some of the problems relate to difficulties in recruiting nurses. Horton, like every other hospital in Oxfordshire, is suffering and is finding it difficult to recruit either state registered or state enrolled nurses. Nursing services are extremely stretched. At Horton beds are closed because of a combination of recruitment problems and revenue difficulties.

In a recent letter to the county's Members of Parliament, the district group manager, Dr Paine, observed:

"The options will have to be those which will bring up the level of nursing staff on individual wards to such a level that they can feel that they carry out their duties effectively and without exhaustion and disillusion, as is too commonly the present case. It looks as though some reductions of service will be inescapable if this is to be achieved within even the optimistic predictions for the district's funding in 1986."

That letter was written prior to certain of the unexpected expenditure which the district will incur, such as the rates increase to which I drew the attention of the House earlier.

There is genuine concern that, because Oxfordshire health authority has not been able fully to fund the increases in nurses' pay, the number of nurses at Horton has had to be cut. That has meant that beds have had to come out of service and it has hit, in particular, cold surgery so that the waiting times for operations have lengthened and on a number of occasions the hospital has not been able to use the operating theatres in the most cost effective way.

I have read with interest the auditor general's recent study into nursing and I fully appreciate the argument that substantial savings can be made nationwide on redeploying nurses. However, having made several visits to Horton hospital, and having discussed the matter at considerable length with those involved, I am more than satisfied that in Horton the nursing staff are already being used as cost effectively and efficiently as possible, given the size of the hospital, the present 37½ hour working week which makes it difficult to provide 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week cover, and other contraints imposed by the Royal College of Nursing. I should be very surprised if anyone going into Horton could find a more cost effective way of using the money available for the nursing staff. The situation with nurses will be even more critical next year as each 1 per cent. increase in nurses' pay, which is not funded centrally, costs Oxfordshire health authority £8 million. When will we have a system of pay reviews that ensures that health authorities have available locally the resources necessary to honour pay awards agreed nationally.

The last matter to which I wish to draw the attention of the House and which impinges upon the efficiency and effectiveness of Horton hospital is the effect of the recent introduction of the regulations on the maximum amount of money available to keep people in private nursing homes. I support fully the need to control such demand spending and understand why it was necessary to introduce the regulations. However, it is estimated that at any time there are up to 20 people in Horton hospital who are not really ill. They are old and would be far better off in nursing homes, but they cannot be admitted to private nursing homes because the Department of Health and Social Security cannot fund them. In consequence, they are costing the community far more by being in hospital and they are also taking up valuable beds which could be used by patients in need of acute medical beds.

The chairman of Oxfordshire health authority and the chairman of Oxfordshire community health council have as a matter of urgency been carrying out an evaluation of all the private nursing provision in Oxfordshire. If it should be shown that the present DHSS levels have been set too low to enable private nursing homes to provide proper accommodation for those who are entirely dependent upon the DHSS for support, I trust that my hon. Friend will again consider the limits. It must be in everybody's interest that no acute bed in a general hospital is unnecessarily occupied.

I hope that by the tenor of my comments I have made it clear to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and to the House that I do not approach this matter by way of special pleading. I hope that I approach it by way of balanced and objective analysis, wishing to try to discover how it is that at a time when more money than ever before is being devoted to the Horton hospital and to the National Health Service as a whole we find ourselves in the curious position that, notwithstanding, there are empty beds at a good, efficient hospital like Horton. The Horton hospital is a first class general hospital. We intend to ensure that it remains a first class general hospital that is able effectively and efficiently to serve the medical needs of local people.

11.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I am very grateful for the opportunity to respond to this Adjournment debate. It is well known to the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) takes a very close interest in all the affairs of his constituency but particularly in the medical cover that is provided for his constituents—appropriate indeed for the son of a medical family.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for placing his entirely fair points in the context of the increasing and expanding medical care that is being provided by this Government. I do not wish to enter into a statistical knock-about, but it cannot be said too often that significantly and steadily, in real terms, this Government have increased the proportion of resources that are devoted to the National Health Service both nationally and regionally, including the Oxfordshire district and the Horton general hospital.

The real terms increase in expenditure since 1979 will be over 20 per cent. this year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has announced that during the next three years we shall continue to give the same degree of priority to the NHS. Expenditure in Great Britain on the NHS is set to rise by nearly £2·8 billion to well over £20 billion in 1988-89. That represents a real terms increase in each year.

I shall now refer briefly to the Oxford region. I represent an Oxfordshire constituency and therefore take a particular interest in the region. It reinforces my ministerial responsibilities. My hon. Friend referred to the resource allocation working party. Pressures continue upon the Oxford region. They spring largely from its rapid growth in population. The pressures on the Oxford region have been taken into account in the allocations. For example, the allocation to the region in 1986-87 represents an increase of 7·3 per cent. over 1985-86. That compares with increases in other regions that range from 5·7 per cent. to 8 per cent.

This is a slightly lower allocation, in cash terms, than that which the region had hoped for or expected, but an increase of 7·3 per cent. is significant when there are heavy pressures upon expenditure generally. That allocation will put the region back on the course from which it was deflected. It will move towards its target of receiving a fair share of resources and it will correct the drift away from that target which has been a feature of recent years. The region, we estimate, is now within 2 per cent. of its target. The planning guidelines which we are now issuing to the regions, predict growth for Oxford of 1·7 per cent. in 1987-88 and 1·8 per cent. in 1988-89, and are designed to continue this process. I therefore submit that Oxford is feeling the benefit of the change in the RAWP formula in 1985-86 from past population figures to population projections for the year of allocation, a change specifically aimed to reflect more fully the needs of regions with rapidly growing populations. Coming from the region, as I have said, I well recognise that factor.

My hon. Friend referred to the impact of RAWP formula. The regional health authority has put a paper on RAWP to Ministers, and it will have an opportunity to put to Ministers its arguments on this issue in a regional review which will be chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health. We have also asked the National Health Service management board to undertake a review of the RAWP formula, keeping the guidelines which aim at a general equalisation of health provision throughout the country. While the terms of reference of the review have not yet been finalised, the objective is to ensure that the RAWP formula is applied with common sense and sensitivity. This will provide an opportunity for the region to put to the department its particular concerns about the application of the RAWP formula to the Oxford region.

I therefore hope that my hon. Friend recognises in the application of these figures that substantial funds are available. I hope that they have been applied flexibly, recognising the changing pressures in the regions, and specifically in the Oxford region and district.

I deal now with other points which my hon. Friend made about the general pressures on the health authority to meet the pay awards. That is recognised, and it must inevitably be part of any arrangements of the funding of the Health Service. We have provided increases which are above the rate of inflation. It is important to understand that the cost improvement programmes are making available additional funds to authorities which go back into the kitty to cover not only the pay awards but improvement in the services. Resources released in this way through increased efficiency and cost improvements added something like 1·5 per cent. nationally to the money available for services and pay awards. Authorities are expected to improve on that next year. Oxfordshire has a cost improvement programme in 1986-87 of 1·8 per cent. In fact, in 1985 authorities have been able both to fund the 1985 pay awards and to develop services.

Health authorities cannot expect, any more than employers in other industries and services, to be insulated from uncertainties about the level of pay settlements. It would be wholly unrealistic to expect the taxpayer to pick up whatever costs arise. We have no plans to increase health authorities' cash limits to fund pay awards. As we have made clear, there is an inevitable trade-off between expenditure on pay and on services, and the precise balance will vary from year to year. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that that is the way that we must conduct our services.

Mr. Baldry: The difficulty is that district health authorities and others fix their budgets at the beginning of the year in anticipation of a pay award and halfway through the year they find themselves with percentage increases that they did not and could not have anticipated, because of review body decisions.

Mr. Whitney: No one pretends that it is an easy problem. The pay awards must be contained within the steadily increasing percentage of the national wealth that is devoted to health. I hope that with cost improvements authorities will accept that and find sufficient flexibility. The awards are phased and that helps health authorities solve the problem which, I accept, is difficult.

It may not be possible for me to cover all the points mentioned by my hon. Friend. Nationally, there has been an increase of about 50,000 nurses and midwives. My hon. Friend said that the shortening of their working week is a factor in that. We have significantly—perhaps not as much as we should have wished—increased the rates of nurses' pay in real terms. That produces pressures.

I understand that there are problems at the Horton hospital in Banbury and with the Oxfordshire health authority. The authority has set a review committee to

[Mr. Whitney]

work. I am not sure whether it has reported, but when it does we shall consider how the health authority can cope. It is a problem that must be solved locally, because the national picture shows a steady increase in the number of people employed in nursing since we took office.

My hon. Friend mentioned those elderly people who would be better off in a nursing home. He referred to the level of supplementary benefit. From November, the allowance for an elderly person in a private nursing home was increased to £170 per week. That is subject to examination and review. Management consultants are studying the level and its feasibility. We have set in train studies on the assessment of old people to ensure that the service is being provided for those who genuinely need it. At £170 per week, the provision is not ungenerous.

As a Minister with responsibility for social security I had the privilege of going around the country looking at nursing and residential care homes. It struck me as entirely possible to provide a good level of care in nursing homes with such funding. I hope that will continue to be the case.

It is regrettable if facilities are not used. Because of the way in which we run our Health Service, many decisions at local level must be taken by the district health authority. My hon. Friend was kind enough to accept that the resources made available to the Oxfordshire health authority and the Horton hospital were not ungenerous. The Oxfordshire health authority has gained substantially and expenditure on Oxford district between 1978-79 and 1984-85 has more than doubled, representing an increase of 13 per cent. above inflation.

During the past six years £2·1 million has been spent on capital developments at the Horton hospital, and in 1983 four new operating theatres were completed. Next year a new phase will begin which will provide 100 beds for elderly people and a new day hospital at a cost of £5·2 million. There are plans to replace the accident and emergency unit. The upgrading scheme will be assisted by local fund-raising, which, as my hon. Friend says, demonstrates the support for the hospital.

This is a good story. I understand the problems, but with the support that the health authority is receiving at national level, I hope that it can cope with them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Managua

1. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government's ambassador with responsibility for Nicaragua last visited Managua.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): Her Majesty's ambassador, who resides in San José but is also accredited to Nicaragua, is in Managua. He last visited Managua from 17 to 19 December 1985.

Mr. Meadowcroft: We are glad to hear that the diplomat is in Managua. Does the Secretary of State accept that the efforts of the United States to isolate Nicaragua are self-fulfilling? Do the Government support those efforts? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that to promote the Contadora process for peace necessitates regular communications in Managua by our representative? What progress is being made towards that end?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We support the Contadora process and have our own policy in that respect, in line with that of our European partners. On 20 January the Foreign Affairs Council gave a public welcome to the fresh impetus given to the Contadora process in Caraballeda in Venezuela, and we issued a statement urging that concrete steps be taken to facilitate the Contadora process. We obviously take steps to ensure that the United States is aware of our views. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the importance of representation in Managua. It was for that reason that I decided that the post should be reopened in May 1984, and its manning is kept under constant review.

Mr. Foulkes: What the Secretary of State has just said is welcome, but is he aware that last week the Minister of State, his hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), said:

"Terrorism is terrorism from whomsoever it comes . . . wherever terrorism occurs it must be condemned"?—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 1109.]

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that that also includes United States-funded terrorism by the Contras against Nicaragua?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have made it plain that we do not believe that the problems of Central America, any more than of any other region, can be solved by armed force. We have urged the need for restraint on all sides, and we have taken note of and welcomed the statement by President Reagan some time ago that he is not seeking the military overthrow of the Sandinista Government.

British Overseas Interests

2. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the means by which his Department secures its objectives of promoting and protecting British interests overseas; how he is monitoring their implementation; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): Foreign and Commonwealth Office departments and posts work to agreed objectives and their performance is subject to regular assessment and review. This permits flexibility in our response to changing circumstances, such as the steadily increasing demand for commercial activities.

Mr. Thurnham: What detailed assessment is my hon. Friend making to show how the Department is doing its job?

Mr. Eggar: I am delighted to say that we have recently instituted a diplomatic wing top management system which requires posts, departments and under-secretaries to examine their objectives and performance in time for each annual expenditure survey. This is a major new management tool, which supplements the existing arrangements.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How were British interests protected in Iran in 1980 when the British ambassador evicted five American citizens from the residential compound of the British embassy? Is the Minister aware that that decision was seen as an affront to American public opinion? Is he further aware that there has been a row in North America in the media about what happened four years ago over the hostages crisis? Do the British Government intend to apologise to the American Government for their disgraceful actions?

Mr. Eggar: At that time, and subsequently, we worked extremely closely with the Americans. Those events took place six years ago.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of securing British interests overseas is through the effective use of the British Council? Will he assure the House that he will fight for every resource that the British Council needs to advance our interests?

Mr. Eggar: The council performs a valuable role, but that role and its funding must be seen in the context of the FCO's overall resources.

Terrorism (Colonel Gaddafi)

3. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate discussions with European colleagues to counteract the threat made by Colonel Gaddafi on 16 January to train, arm and finance terrorists.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have always played a leading part in discussions with European colleagues about terrorist activities and threats from Libya and elsewhere, and we shall continue to do so. On 27 January European

Community Foreign Ministers made clear their determination to strengthen co-operation to deal with all forms of terrorism and established a new group, within political co-operation, to ensure effective follow-up action.

Mr. Haynes: When will Her Majesty's Government take action against those countries which harbour and train people for terrorism? Why does the Secretary of State not call in the ambassadors of those countries and let them know, in no uncertain terms, how Britain feels about countries training terrorists to carry out acts in other countries?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I assure the hon. Gentleman that wherever there is evidence of support for terrorism by foreign Governments we do not hesitate to make clear our condemnation and to take the necessary steps to deter and, if possible, to stop such support. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is unacceptable for other countries to export violence to the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although Libya has a gangster regime, that does not justify yesterday's air piracy by Israel? Does he also agree that fighting terror with terror will only escalate lawlessness and encourage the extremists on both sides?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have issued a statement today condemning that action. There was no evidence of terrorists on board the aircraft or of any threat to Israel's security. In our view, the interception was without justification. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a dangerous precedent, which appears to have been in contravention of international law. Such acts can only endanger the lives of innocent people.

Mr. Ron Brown: As the Government have condemned that act of piracy, will the Secretary of State also condemn America's war fleet manoeuvres along the Libyan coast?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That has nothing to do with terrorism.

Viscount Cranborne: Will my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledge that a Libyan freighter, which has been on fire, is in Portland harbour in my constituency? With their usual hospitality, the people of Weymouth have been harbouring the crew of that freighter. Will he point out to Colonel Gaddafi and his representatives that they would do well to acknowledge that hospitable treatment, and that the Libyan Government would do well to act in concert with the hospitality that has been received?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I readily agree with my hon. Friend that the people of Libya, and of many other countries, would do well to follow the example of his constituents in respect of hospitality and courtesy, and no doubt in many other respects.

Dr. Owen: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that his comments about the forcing down of a Libyan aircraft by Israeli planes are in strong contrast with the support of Her Majesty's Government for the American action over the Egyptian airliner? Does he agree that if international law and the freedom of the airways are to be upheld, it is not for member states to determine whether aircraft have terrorists on board, and that there must be no intervention? The Foreign Secretary would do well to apply even-handedly his view on upholding international law.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I always appreciate advice from the right hon. Gentleman, but I must tell him that there is a distinction between the two cases to which he referred. In relation to the action against the Egyptian jet, it was relevant to take account of the international conventions on hijacking and hostage-taking, which make it clear that people of the sort involved should be brought to face justice by trial, prosecution or extradition. There is a difference.

Australia

4. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's current relations with Australia.

Mr. Eggar: Our relations with Australia are excellent. As I said on 3 February on Second Reading of the Australia Bill, they are of the greatest importance to us.

Mr. McNamara: Following the visit of Senator Evans, will the Government confirm that they will take an active equal part in the technical assessment group which is examining the problems associated with the nuclear debris in Maralinga?

Mr. Eggar: During Senator Evans' visit agreement was reached in principle on two major points. We accepted his invitation to participate in the technical assessment group, and we are represented on the consultative group.

Mr. Holt: Does my hon. Friend accept that we all appreciate our wonderful relationship with Australia, and that that is especially identified with the number of Australian visitors to Britain during the past few years? Last year there were more than 500,000 such visitors. Does he accept that they were most welcome in my constituency, which is where Captain Cook was born and raised?

Mr. Eggar: I echo my hon. Friend's sentiments and hope that tourism in his constituency is suitably increased as a result of his remarks.

Israel

5. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Israel.

8. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, following the visit of the Israeli Premier, Shimon Peres, there has been any improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations; and if he will make a statement.

15. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anglo-Israeli relations following the visit of Mr. Shimon Peres.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The visit of the Israeli Prime Minister last month as the guest of the Government demonstrated the close links between the United Kingdom and Israel. Out talks with him were friendly and constructive. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister accepted an invitation to visit Israel later this year.

Mr. Yeo: Will my right hon. and learned Friend continue to do everything that he can to encourage the

efforts of the responsible elements on each side in the middle east? Does he agree that Israel could do more to help the peace-making process by refraining from forcing down airliners and by abandoning its policy of establishing settlements in Arab-dominated areas on the West Bank?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend on both points. It is essential that both sides should refrain from acts of violence or making threats of violence. We have repeatedly made it clear to Israel that its settlement policy is illegal and is an obstacle to peace. To freeze settlements would increase confidence in Israeli intentions, and that was one matter discussed with the Israeli Prime Minister.

Mr. Mikardo: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recall that everyone who met Mr. Peres and listened to him during his visit was deeply impressed by his manifestly passionate desire to further the peace process, at whatever cost, including stopping the establishment of settlements on the West Bank? Will the Government exercise whatever influence they can, limited though it unhappily is, to help him in that objective?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Of course. It was clear from our discussions with the Israeli Prime Minister that he is anxious to promote the peace process, and for that reason we value the discussions that we had with him. To carry that peace process forward will require a willingness to make concessions on both sides, after we have completed the difficult task of establishing who should be the representative spokesmen for both sides.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: On the question of concessions, can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that Mr. Peres is ready to treat with a Palestinian-Jordanian delegation that could include PLO members, provided that they are not connected with terrorism?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is not yet the position, although it was with the intention of establishing some such way forward that we extended an invitation last September to the joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation to visit Britain. We must continue the search for every possible way of building that bridge between the two sides.

Mr. Cartwright: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that his condemnation of Israeli action against the Libyan aircraft yesterday will be widely welcomed? Does not the failure of Israeli intelligence involved in yesterday's escapade cast grave doubt on the justification for previous Israeli strikes against alleged terrorist targets in Lebanon, Tunisia and elsewhere, which were based on similar Israeli intelligence?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is not possible to comment on another country's intelligence, least of all in respect of a series of other unidentified incidents. The whole episode underlines the importance of restraint and determination when dealing with terrorists and terrorism, to ensure that only those who are identifiably guilty are the recipients of any recriminations.

Mr. Walters: Israel has a truly deplorable record of international terrorism and air piracy. I appreciate that my right hon. and learned Friend has issued a statement. Will he continue to emphasise to the Israeli Government that such violations of international law are damaging to peace and that it is no good talking about peace unless one acts accordingly?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I appreciate the way in which my hon. Friend has put his question, in the light of recent incidents. When handling all such matters, it is important to remain evenhanded and firm in one's condemnation of every kind of illegality.

Mr. Janner: I unreservedly welcome the Government's decision to stop the practice of the authentification of Arab boycott documents. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman repeat his condemnation of the boycott as a completely unacceptable interference with freedom of trade?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As the hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware, we have always condemned the boycott. I am glad to have been able to take a practical step which indicates our views.

Mr. Hicks: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that he advised the Israeli Prime Minister that no meaningful progress can be made in the middle east until the American and Israeli Governments acknowledge the fact that the Palestinians can be represented only by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in any future negotiations, as the Arab world has collectively agreed and repeatedly stated?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I appreciate my hon. Friend's presentation of the Arab world's view. We do not accept that the PLO is the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. We have no doubt that the PLO should be associated with negotiations, provided that it renounces violence and is committed to a peaceful settlement along familiar lines.

Mr. Anderson: Leaving aside the formula of the sole, legitimate representative, the Foreign Secretary will recall that in the Venice declaration of June 1980 we agreed that the PLO must have a role in peace negotiations. No conditions were applied at that time. Does that remain our policy, and, if so, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us the nature of the message that Prime Minister Peres wished him to convey to King Hussein about the PLO's role in peace negotiations?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It would not be appropriate for me to give details of the messages being passed in such circumstances. I can confirm that the Israeli Prime Minister and His Majesty King Hussein are seeking to find a way to carry forward the peace process, based on the initiative taken by King Hussein last year. In that context, we have made it clear, as we did in the Venice declaration, that the PLO must be associated with the negotiations.

Sir Frederic Bennett: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that in Strasbourg last week, when speaking to the representatives of 21 European countries, President Mubarak, who is, after all, a founder member of the peace process in the middle east, said that negotiations which did not include PLO representatives had no hope of success?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not aware of that statement by President Mubarak. I shall study the speech to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention. I join him in paying tribute to the part played in those negotiations by President Mubarak.

Iran-Iraq War

6. **Mr. Robert C. Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiative he plans to take to help end the Iran-Iraq war.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We will fully support any realistic initiatives aimed at bringing an end to this tragic and wasteful conflict, especially through the good offices of the United Nations Secretary General and his special representative, Olof Palme.

Mr. Brown: What weapons are the Government supplying to Iraq and Iran? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure us that when he next meets his European counterparts he will go all out for a complete arms embargo to both sides in this dreadful conflict, so that we can at least say that we are not keeping this awful war going?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I share the hon. Gentleman's condemnation of this pointless, prolonged and bloody conflict. The Government's policy is, and has been for some time, not to sell defence-related equipment to either side which would significantly enhance the capability of either side to prolong or exacerbate the conflict. All applications for the export of defence equipment are scrutinised rigorously to exclude such items. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and he should commend that policy more widely.

Sir John Farr: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that it is important to ensure that Iraq comes out of this struggle with every honour and assistance from the Government? Will he approach Iran and see what steps can be taken to protect British merchant shipping, which has been subjected to attack and boarding by Iranian troops in the Gulf quite recently? Can we not provide some protection for British merchant vessels?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend about the need to impress on both sides the need to enter into negotiations. I have taken note of the willingness of the Iraqi Government to do so. I hope that that view will be taken on both sides. We deplore the attacks on innocent merchant vessels and have taken action to prevent interference with shipping, consistent with article 51 of the United Nations charter.

Mr. Tom Clarke: What initiatives have the Government taken to obtain the support of the United Nations to stop the flow of arms to both sides in this war, especially in view of the escalation in the use of chemical weapons, which represent a tragedy and a bigger barrier to a solution?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I share the hon. Gentleman's condemnation of the use or potential use of chemical weapons in this or any other conflict. That is why we took the lead in the European Community, and thereafter in the United Nations, in getting a ban imposed on the export of chemicals capable of use in composing chemical weapons. We have supported resolutions to that effect in the United Nations as well.

Mr. Latham: As hundreds of thousands of people have already been killed in this war, which has gone on for years, what are the five permanent members of the Security Council doing to stop it? Why do they not try to work in concert on the matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: This is one of the relatively few matters on which the five permanent members of the Security Council take a similar view. It is raised in consultations that I have with any of them. The task that has been attempted by almost every conceivable mediator recently, of bringing both sides to a peaceful conclusion of the conflict, has so far eluded all of those efforts, but I shall keep my hon. Friend's advice in mind.

Central America

7. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by the Council of Ministers to the United States of America on its policy in Central America.

Mr. Eggar: None, Sir. However, the United States Government are aware of the Twelve's views on Central America. The Twelve support a comprehensive negotiated settlement in Central America, based on the Contadora objectives. This was made clear in the communiqués issued after the Luxembourg conference, and more recently in the statement issued on 20 January welcoming the impetus given to the Contadora process by the Caraballeda declaration.

Mr. Davies: What is the response of the Government and the Council of Ministers to President Reagan's recent description of the Contras in Nicaragua as freedom fighters? Does the Minister share the view of many British people that the Contras are nothing more than terrorists, and that the only effect of their actions in Nicaragua is to undermine the democratically elected Government's efforts to improve the living conditions of ordinary people?

Mr. Eggar: The Government believe that the region's problems cannot be solved by armed force. We constantly urge restraint on all sides. We welcome President Reagan's written assurance to a United States Congressman last year that he is not seeking the military overthrow of the Sandinista Government.

Mr. Adley: As President Reagan, in the State of the Union message, referred to those people as freedom fighters, and as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said — and we all agree — that we should not be selective in the use of such phrases, will my hon. Friend ensure that a message is sent to President Reagan telling him that many people in western Europe feel that if the phrase "freedom fighters" applies to those people, it should also apply to the ANC, the UDF and the Palestinians?

Mr. Eggar: We are convinced that the problems of the region cannot be resolved by armed force. We regularly and constantly discuss important issues about Central America with the United States Administration, who are well aware of our views.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister not accept that there is something inconsistent about British policy towards Central America, in that the Government reduced and then removed all aid to Nicaragua, but increased it to Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala? Are the Government prepared to support repressive and not especially democratic Governments, while being critical of the Government of Nicaragua? Should not the Government come clean and, if they do support the

Contadora process, say that they condemn the human rights violations in the other countries? Will the Government immediately resume aid to the people of Nicaragua?

Mr. Eggar: There is nothing inconsistent in our policies. We have not stopped aid to Nicaragua.

Mr. Healey: If, indeed—as we all hope—President Reagan is not aiming at the overthrow of the Nicaraguan Government, is it not the most cynical and brutal irresponsibility for him to ask for arms, organisation and money for a most brutal group of terrorists who are seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan Government?

If the Government indeed support the Caraballeda declaration of last week, which was also supported by America's allies in the area, notably the Governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica, will they further the recommendation of the Caraballeda group that the United States should negotiate directly with the Government of Nicaragua for an end to the conflict?

Mr. Eggar: The right hon. Gentleman simply could not have been listening to the replies given by my right hon. and learned Friend and myself. A clear statement was issued on 20 January in support of the Caraballeda process.

South ica

9. **Mr. Stan Thorne** [illegible] he Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwea[illegible]fairs what representations are being made to the Sou[illegible]frican authorities regarding the remaining four defe[illegible]s in the United Democratic Front treason trial.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): We voted for Security Council resolution 560 calling for the dropping of charges against leaders of the United Democratic Front. We have also repeatedly called, independently and with our European and Commonwealth partners, for the release of all political prisoners. That remains our position.

Mr. Thorne: Although I welcome the fact that 12 people have been released, I must ask whether the Government are prepared to take a further initiative on behalf of the four trade unionists still charged with high treason.

Mrs. Chalker: We have already made the South African Government well aware of our attitude towards the trial of all the UDF leaders. Certainly the prosecution of the UDF is inconsistent with the South African Government's announced desire for dialogue with non-violent representatives of other communities. We shall make such representations as we can.

Mr. Dykes: Although I welcome my hon. Friend's reference to the farce of all those trials and her call on behalf of the Government for them to be dropped, may I ask whether she agrees that the UDF, the ANC and other representatives of the black majority are gaining increasing support? Does she further agree that middle-class blacks are becoming increasingly radical and revolutionary because of the absurd oduracy of the South African Government?

What is my hon. Friend's reaction to the latest laughable suggestions by the State President on the exchange of prisoners and on so-called reforms? Will the Government make it clear to the South African Government that until the whole rotten system of apartheid is dismantled there will be no basic justice in that country?

Mrs. Chalker: I shall repeat what I said in the House last week — that we are positively working against apartheid. We have made our views quite clear to the South African Government. The speech of the President of South Africa last week was only part of the process of reform. While it contained statements of principle as well as outlining positive steps to be taken in this Parliamentary Session, there is much more to be done. Steps must be taken on the road to reform, including those mentioned by my hon. Friend. Those steps must not only be legislated upon this Session, but must be put into effect as fully and as speedily as possible.

Mr. Anderson: Does not the continuation of the trial against the four trade unionists, and the separate trial against 22 UDF activists, suggest that the real motive of the South African Government is to silence democratic opposition within their country? Does that not seriously put in question the professed desire of President Botha for profound change? Does the Minister realise that yesterday another trial began, of seven Namibians at Windhoek? Does the Foreign Office recognise the validity of the legal structures raised by the illegal South African regime in Namibia, and if not, what is it doing about it?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: That has nothing to do with the question.

Mrs. Chalker: As my hon. Friend says, the question posed by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) has nothing to do with the original question. I shall do my best to answer the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question. He knows that we do not have discussions with the Government of Namibia, and therefore we do not recognise them. However, the South Africans have such discussions. We have to avoid hardening attitudes in South Africa, while strengthening the hands of those who argue in favour of internal settlements, whether of trials or any other matter.

Nepal

10. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his forthcoming visit to Nepal.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall be accompanying Her Majesty the Queen as Minister in Attendance during Her Majesty's state visit from the 17 to 21 of this month.

Mr. Atkinson: Has my right hon. and learned Friend had the opportunity to study a report that I sent to him of a fact-finding visit to Nepal last month, which included myself and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton)? Does he accept that we found clear evidence of persecutions of Christians in many districts of Nepal? When he meets his counterpart in Nepal, will he suggest that such violations are incompatible with his country's support for the United Nations declarations on human rights?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have seen the reports of my hon. Friend's visit and his report on the outcome of that visit. I was glad to see that the joint delegation of himself and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) received full and open co-operation from the Nepalese

Government. The available evidence suggests that constitutional provisions in Nepal allowing a person to practise and profess his religion are generally respected. However, in appropriate circumstances, we have no hesitation in making known our views on human rights.

Mr. Deakins: Will the Foreign Secretary take advantage of his trip to raise with the Nepalese Government the issue of deforestation in that country, as in other Himalayan regions? That deforestation is increasing the flow in the major rivers of northern India, and thereby reducing food supplies and availability of land for human habitation in both West Bengal in India, and in Bangladesh. Can the Foreign Secretary get something going to reverse that process?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand the importance of the hon. Gentleman's point in general terms, although I am not familiar with the detailed implications for that part of the subcontinent. Some of our aid is already directed towards that objective, and I shall study that matter further in the light of the hon. Gentleman's observations.

Mr. Alton: Given what the Foreign Secretary said in reply to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), is he unaware of the fact that last year over 80 people were arrested for preaching Christianity and that some of them were sent to prison for six years as a result? This is in direct violation of article 18 of the human rights convention, which specifically and expressly allows people to practise their religion in the way that they would wish. How many more violations of human rights and acts of brutality have to occur before Her Majesty's Government make representations to the Government of the kingdom of Nepal?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We must approach these matters with a little more temperance than the hon. Gentleman has done. We must remember that Nepal is an independent nation, with a sovereign right over its constitution. The constitutional provisions are aimed at preventing conversions from Hinduism by inducement or intimidation. We are in regular contact with Nepalese Christian leaders, who have not asked us to intercede. I understand that the Nepalese Foreign Minister is himself a Christian and has undertaken to investigate specific cases that are brought to his attention.

Torture (UN Convention)

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now ratify the United Nations convention against torture.

Mr. Eggar: We intend to ratify the convention, which we signed on 15 March 1985, as soon as possible. We need to check that our current legislation and other arrangements accord with its provisions. We must also consult the dependent territories, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. It is possible that new legislation will be needed.

Mr. Hughes: While those negotiations continue—and everyone hopes that ratification will be completed as soon as possible—will the Government take steps to remedy the position? At present the United Kingdom is one of the few European countries that has not made the unilateral declaration against torture, called for by the United Nations more than eight years ago. Because we have not subscribed to it we appear to condone torture, which is unacceptable to most of our European partners and to countries beyond Europe.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is less than fair to the Government. We wholly condemn torture wherever and whenever it may occur.

Mr. Marlow: Arising from my hon. Friend's reply, is there any evidence that Palestinians have been tortured in gaol, by Israelis?

Mr. Eggar: I am not aware of evidence on that matter, but, if there should be evidence, we deplore all violations of human rights wherever they occur.

Mr. George Robertson: While we are waiting for the Government to get round to signing the convention on torture, should we not do more to control the export of implements that can be used in countries where torture continues to be practised? Although the Government have already introduced some legislation in that regard, surely the House deserves more information about the method by which the Government judge the human rights records of some countries to which they allow the export of equipment that is clearly used for repression and torture.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that we were one of the co-sponsors of the convention. We are committed to ratifying it as soon as possible, and we were one of the first countries to sign it. Regarding the specific question about instruments of torture, last year we introduced the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985, which gives the Government power to restrict the export of instruments of torture. We would not give export licences to any destination or country for leg irons, shackles or gang chains for the restraint of prisoners.

Iran

12. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were made to the Iranian authorities about the recent boarding of a British ship; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tim Renton): Our policy rests firmly on the general principle of freedom of navigation. The Iranian authorities have been asked for an explanation of the reasons why the British registered Barber Perseus was stopped by the Iranian navy on 12 January.

Mrs. Short: What damage was done to the British ship, and if damage was done, has the Minister sought compensation for it? What steps is he taking towards creating international co-operation to ensure that such an occurrence does not recur?

Mr. Renton: I can assure the hon. Lady that no damage was done to the ship. Regarding the international legal position, we uphold strongly the general principle of freedom of navigation on the high seas. Iran may be entitled under article 51 of the United Nations charter to exercise an inherent right of self-defence by stopping and searching foreign merchant ships on the high seas. However, that is an exceptional right, and can be used only if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a vessel of taking arms to the other side for use in a conflict.

Dr. M. S. Miller: What is the difference between one country stopping a ship and boarding it for reasons known to it, and another country doing the same with an aeroplane?

Mr. Renton: Under article 51 of the United Nations charter there is a specific and inherent right of self-defence by stopping and searching foreign merchant ships on the high seas. The Iranians are using that specific right to stop merchant ships. As my right hon. and learned Friend said earlier, the international convention on hijacking means that terrorists should be brought to trial either by prosecution or extradition.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it would be against our long-term interests to abolish the right of search on the high seas?

Mr. Renton: Yes, I take my hon. Friend's point. None the less, we are anxious that the Iranians should act extremely cautiously. Our position is based on the general principle of freedom of navigation and the United Nations charter.

South Africa

13. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further action is to be taken by the Council of Ministers to seek to secure an end to apartheid in South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Council of Ministers agreed in Luxembourg on 10 September last year on a programme of positive and restrictive measures in relation to South Africa. At the meeting between the Twelve and the front-line states on 3 and 4 February, which I attended, these measures were endorsed. The meeting endorsed also the initiative of the Commonwealth eminent persons group.

Mr. Cohen: I welcome yesterday's communiqué by the EEC Foreign Ministers and the front-line states, although I do not think that it goes far enough. I note that the communiqué states—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Of course, I am reading from the communiqué.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must summarise.

Mr. Cohen: The communiqué states that the EEC should consider

"further restrictive measures against Pretoria"

if the current limited EEC sanctions do not have the desired results. What is the timetable in which those desired results will be achieved? If those measures are not achieved, when will the restrictive measures be put in place? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reveal what those restrictive measures will be?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot give — [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] I give notice that I am not reading, Mr. Speaker. The Commonwealth Heads of Government communiqué issued in Nassau stated that, at the conclusion of a period after the establishment of the eminent persons group, further consideration would be given to the position. A similar statement was made in the Luxembourg statement from the Six, but without any limitation of time. The communiqué issued from Lusaka yesterday adds nothing to those two statements. The position therefore remains open.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in the light of the speech at the opening of the South African Parliament by the State President of the Republic of South Africa, the Council of Ministers should now give full encouragement to the South African Government, who are pledged to remove apartheid from their country, especially in view of the reforms announced by the State President with respect to education, influx control and property rights, and the Government's determination to involve all population groups in the Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend has drawn attention, as he is entitled to do, to the positive aspects of the President's speech, which we certainly welcome. We noted the commitment in the President's speech and the reference to the goal of parity in the provision of education. The important thing is to ensure that these measures are implemented and carried forward at a pace that carries conviction in South Africa. It is important also that we should do everything that we can to open the way to dialogue between the South African Government and the representatives of the African people in that country. It is in that spirit that we made our comments in yesterday's Lusaka communiqué.

Mr. Caborn: Further to what my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said about the Lusaka communiqué—embodied in that is the reference to the genuine representatives of the black people in South Africa —will the right hon. and learned Gentleman prevail on the South African authorities to start negotiations with the ANC?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is not for us, in respect of South Africa or any other situation, to make the choice as to who are the true representatives of the people concerned. However, it is certainly right that they should take part in the negotiations. We are encouraging the prospect of dialogue between the South African Government and the true representatives of the black people of South Africa. That is one of the objectives of the Commonwealth eminent persons group. It was welcomed by the meeting yesterday in Lusaka. We must hope that it will help to pave the way forward.

Mr. Forth: Is my right hon and learned Friend convinced of the legitimacy of the basis on which the Council of Ministers seeks to interfere in the internal affairs of another country? When did the South African Government last seek to advise and interfere in the internal affairs of the European Economic Community?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that the examples are exactly comparable. I have no doubt that on many occasions Governments offer advice to others of such a sort. I do not think that the Community has ever been lacking in advice from other quarters. My hon. Friend must acknowledge the importance to the future peace and stability of the whole of southern Africa that attaches to the progress that can be made in removing apartheid from South Africa. That is a matter on which the Commonwealth and the Community, as well as the overwhelming majority of Members of this place, take a common view.

Mr. Beith: Will the Foreign Secretary stand by the words of the communiqué rather than distance himself, as the Prime Minister appeared to do when she returned from Nassau, from the possibility of any further restrictive measures being taken? Is it not important to underline to

South Africa that such measures might be taken, lest it think that it is safe from any external pressure so long as the present British Government remain in office?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The communiqué issued from Nassau, in language a little more specific than that which came from Luxembourg in the preceding month, makes it plain that at the conclusion of the work of the eminent person's group the countries represented on that group will then consider the position. We are not committed to any further measures after that point, but consideration whether to take them will certainly arise at that stage.

Mr. Healey: We on the Opposition Benches share the disappointment expressed by the Foreign Secretary in Lusaka at the failure of Mr. Botha in his recent speech to offer any increase in political power to the great black majority in South Africa. Secondly, we welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's decision to allow his officials to contact leaders of the African National Congress in Lusaka. May I take it that he will extend the same right to his officials to contact the ANC in London? Thirdly, will he explain to the House why, as reported, he vetoed any criticism of the United States Administration's red carpet reception for Jonas Savimbi in Washington, when Mr. Savimbi is involved in an armed uprising against a Government with whom we have diplomatic relations and who were represented at the meeting? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that Mr. Savimbi is using terrorism and hostage-taking as major weapons in his struggle?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I did not veto any comment of the sort to which the right hon. Gentleman referred in the third part of his supplementary question. The issue was not raised in the preparation of the communiqué. It was clear that the Governments assembled took a different view of the matter from the United States Administration, but that was not so stated in the communiqué. I welcome what the right hon. Gentleman says about the decision to have contact at official level with the African National Congress. We took the view that it was important at this critical time to get across the case against violence and that for general dialogue. We wanted also to get across the role of the Commonwealth eminent persons group, which was recognised by the representatives of the ANC. Contact with the ANC in London will be decided in the context of the decision that has already been taken.

Lesotho (South African Blockade)

14. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he received from the South African authorities on the representations he made regarding the blockade of Lesotho.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Member will know that the South African authorities have now lifted the blockade on Lesotho. We understand that traffic is flowing normally between the two countries.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister explain why the Government did not respond to the request from the former Prime Minister for assistance when it was received? The request remained on the Prime Minister's desk for seven days. Why did the Government allow the blockade to continue by not supplying the airlift that was requested?

Mrs. Chalker: I think that the hon. Gentleman has one or two matters slightly confused. I do not blame him for that, because I can do the same thing myself. We made our concern about the blockade of Lesotho clear to the South Africans from day one. We are pleased that the restrictions have now been lifted. We have been active in Lesotho in trying to assist it and we hope that peace will now return. We shall make whatever representations may be necessary in future.

Mr. Sayeed: Has my hon. Friend any reason to believe that the South African regime assisted in engineering the downfall of the Government of Chief Jonathan?

Mrs. Chalker: No, Sir.

Terrorism

16. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on an effective co-ordinated European response to international terrorism.

Mr. Renton: We have taken, and will continue to take, whatever steps we can to achieve an effective response to international terrorism. European Community Foreign Ministers made clear their determination on 27 January to strengthen co-operation to deal with all forms of terrorism, including the establishment of a new group, within political co-operation, to ensure effective follow-up action.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Minister tell us whether the Government are urging the European Community to prevail upon the Americans and the Russians to co-operate with it in controlling international terrorism, particularly in view of the fact that the Americans, at the time of the interception of the Egyptian plane, acted unilaterally?

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. In fact, our response and our approach to other states are somewhat broader than he outlines. We are seeking bilaterally, and within the European Community, to persuade all other countries to co-operate with us in the fight against terrorism. We have no doubt that international co-operation is an essential means of reducing, and in the end beating, the sort of terrorism of which we see far too much at the moment.

Mr. Dickens: How can the Minister justify his statement about the initiative against terrorism when earlier this afternoon his own Secretary of State condemned the action of Israel in bringing down and searching an aircraft which it had strong grounds to believe was carrying not only terrorists but terrorist leaders from the safe haven of Colonel Gaddafi, who arms, trains and finances terrorism? How can we talk about a concerted effort against terrorism, and at the same time condemn a country that has started to do something about it?

Mr. Renton: I have to say that I am surprised at my hon. Friend's remarks. As my right hon. and learned Friend made plain earlier, we regard the Israeli action of yesterday as an unjustified and apparently illegal interference with civil aviation. It is a dangerous precedent. If every country were to take its interpretation of international law into its own hands in that manner, we would be reaching an extremely dangerous and worrying international situation.

Mr. Faulds *rose*——

Mr. George Robertson: While we welcome the Community initiative on international terrorism, may I ask

the hon. Member to confirm that the Government continue to stick to their position that they will not take action against other sovereign nation states unless there is rigorous, objective and verifiable evidence to base it on? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Renton: I can say to the hon. Gentleman that I do not think that either he or I caused the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) to leave the Chamber. I can say to the hon. Gentleman that our interpretation of the rigorous or clear evidence which he mentioned might be somewhat different. However, in principle I agree with his statement that action should be taken against terrorism only where there is clear evidence to sustain it. That is the most important feature that we must abide by at present.

Central America

18. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Council of Ministers is taking to support the Contadora peace process in Central America.

Mr. Eggar: The agreement reached at Luxembourg on 11 and 12 November 1985 provides a practical demonstration of the Twelve's consistent support for the Contadora process for closer political and economic links with the Central American states. The European Community also agreed to increase substantially its aid to Central America to encourage regional co-operation.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not a fact that in our urgency to placate the United States of America in practically everything, including selling Britain to it, the Contadora peace struggle is being ruined by the United States? Is it not the case that the President tries to get troops to assault a Government who have struggled to break free of United States influence in the interests of democracy, yet pretends that he is advancing the cause of democracy? When will the Government stand up to the United States of America and advise her that it is for her own good openly to support democracy and stop supporting every dictatorship in Latin America?

Mr. Eggar: We have repeatedly said that we have our own policy. We support the comprehensive and verifiable Contadora agreement, which is based upon the 21 Contadora objectives, which include peace, stability, democracy and development. The United States has repeatedly said that it supports the Contadora peace process. It is well aware of our views.

Middle East

19. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on developments in the middle east peace process since the visit to London by Mr. Shimon Peres.

Mr. Tim Renton: Moderates on both sides have our full support in their continuing efforts to move towards the peaceful negotiation of a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute.

Mr. Latham: Has my hon. Friend noticed that the PLO leaders who have been meeting King Hussein in Amman during the last few days have again explicitly refused to recognise resolution 242? Will he confirm that there can be no place for the PLO in negotiations so long as that remains their attitude?

Mr. Renton: My interpretation of the Amman discussions is not exactly the same as that of my hon. Friend, although I appreciate his close interest in the matter. King Hussein is clearly trying to reach a formula under which it will be possible for moderate Palestinians who abhor violence and who are prepared to say so in public, and who also accept Israel's right to exist within secure borders, to be incorporated in the peace process. Moderates on all sides ought to hope that he will be successful in that aim.

Mr. Ernie Ross: How can the Minister claim that there are Palestinians who are not prepared to work for a peaceful resolution of this problem when they have made it quite clear that they are prepared to accept all and every resolution of both the General Assembly and the Security Council?

Mr. Renton: I wish that what the hon. Gentleman has just said was correct, but unfortunately it is not.

Mr. Crouch: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, arising out of question 13. When the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) sought to put his supplementary question I had some difficulty in following him because he sought to use notes and to read from a communiqué. You are aware, Mr. Speaker, that in this House we practice a form of masochism. Back Benchers are never allowed to use notes at Question Time, although that is the accepted practice for those who sit on the Front Bench—a practice which I would not dispute. Can you let me know, because this is very important, whether the practice that allows the leaders of the parties to use notes extends to the leader of the Liberal party and of the other parties when they sit on the Back Benches? Can you also let me know what standing order, convention or guideline in "Erskine May" prohibits Back Benchers from ever using notes when putting questions?

Mr. Speaker: It has always been perfectly in order for hon. Members to refer to notes, but the convention of the House is that hon. Members should not quote from them.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that it would be helpful to take further points of order. We have a very heavy day ahead of us.

Mr. Cohen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not in order for Back Benchers who want to refer to a specific quotation, as I did this afternoon, to read out the quotation?

Mr. Speaker: The convention that I enunciated to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) has always been the practice of this House.

Mr. Skinner: On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Arising out of questions?

Mr. Skinner: Yes. There has been another leak.

Mr. Speaker: Arising out of Foreign Office questions?

Mr. Skinner: I will just explain. There has just been an announcement that there is an emergency at Sellafield——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take the hon. Gentleman's point of order after the statements.

Sir John Farr: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Arising out of questions?

Sir John Farr: Yes. I should like to ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions could be made a little easier to understand. So many of them today have just referred to the views of the Council of Ministers. The correct description is either the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community or the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Because of the question asking for the views of the Council of Ministers, would it not be better if the phrase "Council of Ministers" always referred to either the European Economic Community Council of Ministers or the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. It is up to hon. Members to decide the form in which they put down their questions. I do not determine that.

English Water Authorities (Privatisation)

3.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about the future of the water authorities in England and Wales.

On 7 February 1985, the then Minister for Housing and Construction, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), announced that the Government would examine the prospects for privatisation in the water industry. A discussion paper followed in April. In the light of the responses, and of professional advice on the financial issues, the Government have now decided to transfer the 10 water authorities in England and Wales to private ownership; already, 25 per cent. of water is supplied by private sector water companies.

With my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I have today presented to Parliament a White Paper setting out our proposals. Legislation will be necessary, and we shall put the water authorities on the market as soon as possible thereafter.

Transferring water to the private sector will offer unique opportunities and challenges. The water authorities are not merely suppliers of goods and services. They are managers of natural resources. They safeguard the quality of our rivers. They control water pollution. They have important responsibilities for fisheries, conservation, recreation and navigation. These functions are inter-dependent and inseparable.

We will maintain the principle of integrated river basin management and we will maintain existing boundaries. The water authorities will be privatised with all their existing responsibilities but for the one exception of land drainage and flood protection. Financing and co-ordination of that function will remain a public sector responsibility.

The authorities are largely natural monopolies. The public will, rightly, expect us to set up a firm regulatory framework. We will appoint a director general of water services. He will control the authorities through an operating licence. This will lay down strict conditions on pricing and on service standards. The system of promoting the interests of consumers will take into account a report which I am publishing today from Professor Littlechild of Birmingham university. Under the director general, there will also be strong machinery for representing consumer interests and investigating complaints.

Water authorities are responsible in England and Wales for the implementation of national policy for the water environment. Necessary existing safeguards—including appeals against water authority decisions on discharges and Government controls on the authorities' own discharges—will continue. And we shall strengthen the system of pollution control in two main ways: first, we shall legislate to make their river quality objectives subject to ministerial approval; secondly, we shall provide for any new requirements to be laid down through a parliamentary procedure. In this way we shall use the opportunity of privatisation to improve environmental standards on a continuing basis.

Over the last seven years considerable progress has been made in improving the management efficiency of water authorities. Their operating costs have been reduced in real terms, even while the demand for their services has been growing. Manpower has been reduced by 20 per cent. The number of board appointments has been reduced even more dramatically—from 313 to 123. In 1979 their investment was falling; in real terms it is now above its 1979 level and it is rising. In the last six years we have made the water authorities fit and ready to join the private sector; and, as reported to the Public Accounts Committee, the quality of water services has been improving in almost all regions.

Privatisation is the next logical step. It will bring benefits to customers, to the industry itself and to the nation as a whole in improved quality, more efficient service, greater commitment of the staff to the work they are doing, and greater awareness of customer preference.

With the disciplines and freedoms of the private sector, I expect the industry to move from strength to strength. I know that these proposals will be welcomed.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): How can there possibly be any justification for a Government selling off what is the nation's most fundamental natural resource on which the people's very existence depends? Is the Secretary of State aware that 99 per cent. of households in England and Wales are connected to the public water supply and that 95 per cent. are connected to the sewerage system? Is it not true that the proposals cannot do other than create private monopolies without affecting in any way choice or competition for the consumer?

Does not the increasing burden of medical evidence about water purity show the need for even more careful public scrutiny and control than exists at present? That is why the Secretary of State for the Environment has had to exempt 25 per cent. of current water supplies from the purity standards set by the EC. Is not the reality that existing problems, including the average currently of more than 4,000 significant sewer collapses for each of the past three years, show the urgent need for massive public investment now?

How can the Government plan to sell off the £27 billion of assets that they do not own and for which they have never compensated local authorities or the ratepayers? The Government do not own those assets. That is the reality.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, following the Government's consultation paper, only seven respondents favoured selling off the water authorities? Is he aware that under existing law Ministers have a statutory duty to promote a national policy for water? The Government have ignored that duty and are now planning to abandon it altogether.

What are the implications for the millions of anglers, water sport enthusiasts, ramblers, ornithologists and others involved in leisure pursuits of paragraph 75 of the White Paper, which says:

> "As a general principle, WSPLCs should aim for the maximum possible cost recovery for those services"?

Is not the reality of that that there will be massively increased charges for all the millions of people, or, even worse, possibly denial of access altogether?

Will private monopolies have the right to disconnect people from their water supply? Will the right hon. Gentleman name those towns to be included in the compulsory metering trials which are envisaged? What estimate has he made of the capital cost involved in meter installation, and who will pay? Will not families with

[Dr. John Cunningham]

small children, large families and those with disabled or invalid people among them be financially much worse off as a result of water metering proposals?

Against the background of massive need for investment, how can privatisation guarantee the hundreds of millions of pounds of urgent and essential investment that is required? Could all the financial objectives that the Government apparently require be met more simply and more quickly by the Government releasing the water authorities from the financial straitjacket in which they have imprisoned them?

These are appalling proposals from a desperate government. They are another example of the Prime Minister's pawnshop politics. Their motivation is a crude, desperate grab for cash to buy votes. They will necessarily endanger public health, pollution control and water purity. The Government are gambling with the nation's health and well-being. In common with the British people, we believe that water resources are national assets, which should be in public ownership and control. A future Labour Government will act accordingly.

Mr. Baker: I gather from the hon. Gentleman's latter comment that, when the proposals proceed and the water authorities are privatised, they will be returned to public ownership. That adds to a long list. When I made a statement five years ago on Cable and Wireless, the Labour party promised that it would take it back into public ownership. It said the same about British Telecom. That is not going to happen.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a series of questions and I will seek to answer them. He asked why in principle we should invite private capital into the ownership of water, which is a monopoly. In other countries, private capital is already invested in water In France, 65 per cent. of the population receives water supplied by private companies. In the United States, 40 per cent. of the utilities that supply water are privately owned.

The hon. Gentleman asked about investment. He was a member of the Government that cut water investment faster and quicker than any other Government in our history. Investment is rising. In 1986-87, for the first time, capital investment in water, including the water authorities and flood protection services, is likely to exceed £1 billion. The level of investment is higher in real terms than it was in 1979.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the water authorities' assets. The assets of the predecessor bodies were vested in the water authorities by the Water Act 1973. Water authorities are public bodies whose members are appointed by the Government. There can be little doubt that the proceeds of the sale should be paid into the Exchequer.

The hon. Gentleman asked about water purity and he alleged strongly that public health was at risk. The high quality of drinking water standards and river quality objectives will be maintained, as will other important public health standards. In no way will the present regime of water standards be weakened. Indeed, in several respects it will be strengthened. For example, standards of effluent discharge will continue to be subject to Government approval. In future, the Government will set river quality objectives, which at present the water authorities set for themselves.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that under the new regime the Secretary of State will retain responsibility for public health standards, drinking water quality and the quality of rivers and bathing waters.

The hon. Gentleman asked about powers to cut off water supplies. Privatisation will not affect water undertakers' powers to cut off water supplies. An elaborate regime operates with a code of conduct in which the DHSS is involved. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that will continue.

The hon. Gentleman ended by saying that our approach was dogmatic and doctrinaire. If it is dogmatic to believe in private ownership, if it is dogmatic to believe in employee shareholding and if it is dogmatic to believe in improved customer services, I am dogmatic. The Labour party believes that the state should own everything from telecommunications to gas to water to council houses. We profoundly disagree with that proposition.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that there are two statements on this matter, followed by a Ten-minute Bill and two Opposition day debates. Many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak in the first debate. I regret that I shall have to limit questions on statements today. Questions on this statement may continue until 4.15 pm, and then we shall have to move on.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): My right hon. Friend's statement is welcome, not least because it will release the provision and organisation of water from the restrictions imposed by the public service borrowing requirement. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on deciding to maintain integrated river basin management. Taking account of the fact that each river authority has different requirements, will the pricing control be organised regionally rather than nationally?

Mr. Baker: On the latter point, I ask my hon. Friend to examine the report published today by Professor Littlechild. He recommends an interesting form of price regulation which relates to service standards. I agree with my hon. Friend completely, as do the representations that we have received, that water authorities should be privatised on a river basin authority level. The authorities have worked well on a river basin basis since 1979, and I confirm that that is our intention. It will improve customer services.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he has not made a case for water privatisation? There is no good reason for it. Is it not clear that the Government are prepared to put profits before the interests of the British people? Is it not time that they stopped privatising everything that they see? The logical conclusion of their activities is that, in the end, the British people will have to pay for the air that they breathe. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to think again. If he will not do so, I ask Conservative Members to think again about exactly where the country is going.

Mr. Baker: A major advantage of seeking private capital is that the capital requirements of the water authorities will not have to compete with all the other demands for capital on the public purse. That trade-off goes on, and Opposition Members know it. There is no reason why the capital requirements of the water authorities should not go to the private sector.

The most important investment programme in the hon. Gentleman's area is the Mersey basin initiative, which will cost more than £4 billion during the next 20 years. I confirm that that programme will go ahead.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Bearing in mind the fact that we are not talking about nationalised resources but in many cases resources paid for by local ratepayers, what compensation will local ratepayers receive for the nationalisation and then denationalisation of the resources for which they, not the state, pay?

Mr. Baker: As I said in response to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the assets of the predecessor bodies were vested in the water authorities by the Water Act 1973. Water authorities are public bodies whose members are appointed by the Government. For that reason, the proceeds will be paid to the Exchequer.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is the Minister aware that after an expenditure of about £400 million, the river Tyne is almost clean and that first class water facilities are provided by the Northumbrian water authority? Incidentally, the Northumbrian water authority is now earning an annual profit of £6 million. Why should that be taken away from the people of Northumbria? Can the Minister guarantee to the people of Northumbria that water prices will not shoot up? On past evidence, privatisation pushes up prices.

Mr. Baker: The price regime which the Government envisage introducing after water privatisation is related to consumer standards and standards of water quality.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): That is meaningless.

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman should read the Littlechild report, which has been published today. If the right hon. Gentleman does so he will find that it is not meaningless.

With regard to the level of water prices after privatisation, I have made it clear to the House that there will have to be a regulatory regime. Some water authority chairmen believe that, following privatisation, there will be a reduction in prices. I heard the chairman of Thames water saying on the radio this morning that he looks forward to the privatised regime as that would lead to reduced prices for Thames water.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on proving that the Government still have many radical and reforming ideas. Will the private water companies be able to build on the 25 per cent. service that they give to the rest of the country? I hope that the dead hand of the Treasury will be out of taxpayers' bills when they pay water rates in future.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend could almost have been quoting my words when I stood at the Dispatch Box five years ago announcing the privatisation of Cable and Wireless. I was asked what the advantage was in privatising Cable and Wireless, and it is recorded that I said that that would relieve—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are under great pressure to make progress.

Mr. Baker: I am answering the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander).

I said five years ago, and I repeat it today, that pressure on public resources can be relieved by going to the private sector. My hon. Friend asked about the 25 per cent. of water supplied by the private sector at present. Opposition Members seem to have forgotten that role played by the private sector. The Government intend to build on that, and those private companies will continue to operate.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does not the Minister realise that, instead of putting the water industry back where it belongs under democratic control, his announcement today will be widely perceived as the latest example of the Government siphoning off national assets in order to keep themselves and their wretched economic policy afloat. Can the Minister tell us what advantages there will be in efficiency, and in competition and for the consumer, or will there be a series of dud buys, as happened in East Anglia, and damage the environment which the private sector has never adequately protected?

Mr. Baker: I have already answered the hon. Gentleman's last point; there will be no damage to the environment. Statutory protection will be built into the proposals for the first time, particularly to safeguard areas like East Anglia, by covering river quality and beach standards.

With regard to consumer protection, I can inform the hon. Gentleman that we envisage statutory consumer committees, and the relation of price regulation with standard will be much greater as reports can be made to the director general, who will have direction powers over the water authorities.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that it was the great Joe Chamberlain, who was a genuinely radical Tory, who did more to raise the health standards in this country than anyone else by setting the great example of bringing water into public ownership? If it is desirable to take the water industry out of that bogus statistic the PSBR—which has done so much damage to our economic policy—that could be done by an administrative announcement tomorrow.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend will be aware that that would have immense implications for the operation of the national economy. There is no easy answer. The water industry is an economic activity which can be effectively financed by the private sector, and we should welcome that fact.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give an undertaking that the existing health and safety machinery for water workers will be maintained? Is he aware that the dangers to water workers from disease have been significantly reduced over recent years through trade union action? Is not the proposed structure of the water industry a public subsidy of private companies, because investment in land drainage and river protection will remain in public hands? He will, in effect, be handing public money into the private hands of his friends.

Mr. Baker: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is yes, and to the latter, no. Sea defences and flood prevention are a public sector responsibility which will be paid for by the public sector.

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members strongly support his statement? Will he confirm that privatisation will

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

enable and encourage water authorities to charge customers for the volume of water used rather than on the basis of rateable value?

Mr. Baker: There will be an experiment on water metering. Many customers in different areas across the country are already switching to meters. I hope to bring legislation effecting the privatisation of the water authorities to the House in the next Session of Parliament. It will include provision for widespread experiment and, possibly, each new house would be obliged to have a water meter should it be in the experimental area.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): What guarantees will the Secretary of State give that domestic consumers will be able to choose whether to have a meter installed under privatisation, and what safeguard will there be against market forces to ensure that if there is a drought the price will not go up?

Mr. Baker: Metering and privatisation are separate issues. We published a little over a month ago the Watts report on metering in which we set out the problems and advantages of metering. We propose to have large scale trials. There is no doubt that some consumers prefer metering because consumption is tied to the price that they pay.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is yet another step forward in the privatisation programme which will be welcomed by those thinking people who realise that transferring assets to the people from the state is very much in their interests and those of the consumer? Is he satisfied that the Littlechild formula that he proposes will stop any abuse of monitoring power? Will he be able to satisfy the House on that point?

Mr. Baker: When my hon. Friend has seen the proposals contained in the Littlechild report, he will be more than satisfied that any abuses of monopoly power will be adequately dealt with. There will be a series of protections. There will be the director general and the Secretary of State will continue to have certain responsibilities. Statutory consumer committees will report to the director general who will have powers, which do not exist now, to direct water authorities and to deal with consumer complaints and standards of service.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Does the Secretary of State accept that the people of Yorkshire in particular, and throughout the country in general, will say that this is the worst piece of legislation that the Government have introduced? He said that there would be strict control over prices. Does that mean that there will be no VAT on water charges and that standing charges will be abolished?

Mr. Baker: I accept that those detailed points are important. I also acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of those matters. We do not envisage any changes.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, contrary to the views expressed by Opposition Members, there will be a welcome in the north-east and Northumberland for today's statement as his proposals will lead to the operation being put on a firmer financial basis, with the introduction of private money, thus enabling the long-term debt for the Kielder dam to be eliminated and prices to the consumer to be reduced?

Mr. Baker: I accept what my hon. Friend has said. He also is an expert in these matters. I am glad to know that so many of my hon. Friends greet the proposals with enthusiasm.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the matter is legally more complicated than he said? Has he taken advice from the Law Officers about paying compensation? He has said, wrongly, that the members of the present water boards are wholly appointed by the Government. Until recently, local authorities nominated many of the board members. Is he aware that the Northumbria water authority is the most efficient in the country? What are his proposals for the timetable for the privatisation of the water authorities. There are strong rumours that the Government intend to privatise the Northumbria water authority because it is the most efficient. Will the Minister confirm or deny that rumour?

Mr. Baker: I propose to bring in a Bill during the next Session of Parliament to allow the privatisation of the water authorities. They will not all be done at once. We envisage two or three being ready for privatisation in 1987.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend deny the rumours which are now sweeping the Lobby that the water industry has been sold to a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors.

Mr. Baker: That is an unlikely eventuality, because the ownership of American water companies is widely spread on a localised basis. I suspect that that will be the pattern of ownership in the United Kingdom as well.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Who will provide the massive amount of finance needed for the renewal of the sewers in the inner cities of the Manchesters of this world?

Mr. Baker: That money has been provided more generously under this Government than under the Labour Government. It has been provided by the Government for the operation of the water authorities. It will continue to be provided by the water authorities which will have the advantage of going to the private sector to obtain that capital.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance on the flood protection works carried out by water authorities? That is a problem with the river Severn in Shrewsbury. Will he bear in mind the fact that Conservative Members would be much more anxious about his proposals were it not for the fact that water authorities are remote, high-handed and bureacratic? Will he also bear in mind that the only thing that the Opposition know about water authorities is the manufacture of crocodile tears?

Mr. Baker: I made it clear in my statement that flood and sea defences and land drainage will continue to be financed by the public sector. I give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement appears to owe more to the need to build up the Treasury's coffers ahead of the

election than to any rational system of running the water services? Does he recall Ministers constantly telling us that competition provides the best protection for the consumer? What competition is provided in those arrangements? How does he suggest that consumers shop around for the best buy in privatised water and sewerage services?

Mr. Baker: I dealt with that in my statement when I described them as a natural monopoly. The competition that will exist in the future will exist between the various water authorities competing for capital funds in the private sector.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I welcome the statement, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that the water ratepayers of south-west Devon are protected from the inefficient track record of South-West water? The South-West water authority loses 30 per cent. of its water through leaks and it is unable to provide enough water for the local ratepayers even though the area has one of the highest rainfalls in the country.

Mr. Baker: I have no doubt that, when these proposals are carried through, the managerial efficiency of water authorities will improve.

Mr. Walter Harrison (Wakefield): Is the Secretary of State aware of what happened to his predecessor when he did the dirty work on behalf of the Government? I go some way towards privatisation with the privatisation of conception.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Reading.

Mr. Harrison: Thank you very much; I had not noticed. However, I found out that this Government are hell bent on the privatisation of birth, the privatisation of cremation, the privatisation of communication, the privatisation of transport and the privatisation of everything else. They are now to privatise water. There is only one thing left, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), the privatisation of fresh air. Where will the Government finish?

Mr. Baker: There are other operations in the public sector which could also be prepared for privatisation.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the obligation to protect the beaches from sewage pollution will not be overlooked after privatisation?

Mr. Baker: I can give my hon. Friend a categorical assurance that environmental standards and pollution control will remain. I have already suggested the several ways in which these controls will be strengthened. I make that absolutely clear to the House so that that particular canard is not allowed to run.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Secretary of State aware of the implications of his decision on the Lake District national park? Is he aware that Ennerdale, Thirlmere, Haweswater, Wet Sleddale, Hayeswater, Meadley, a number of rivers in the Lake District and 40,000 acres of beautiful land in the Lake District owned by water authorities will be sold off? Does he not understand that there are thousands of people in Britain who use the national park and who will object to this national heritage being sold off to city cowboys?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about rights of access, under the privatisation regime the rights of access and rights of way will be preserved.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that 25 per cent. of our water is already supplied perfectly adequately by private water companies? When he was looking at methods of privatisation, did he look at the acceptable method in France, where even Communist local authorities work through private sector organisations? What is wrong with franchising? Would it not lead to more competition?

Mr. Baker: We looked at franchising, but it has difficulties. It is alleged to increase competition but, in our judgment, competition of an unreal type. The critical decision that we have to take is whether water authorities will be held together on a river basin management system. That is the heart of the matter. I agree entirely with the point that my hon. Friend has made. Opposition Members should recognise, as they begin to start their tremendous campaign against this proposal, that 25 per cent. of water supplied in Britain is supplied through the private sector.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is the Secretary of State seriously suggesting that once the North-West water authority is privatised a group of philanthropic businessmen will spend scores, if not hundreds of millions, of pounds of their profits clearing up the stinking, polluted river Mersey? Is it not a fact that once the organisation is privatised the river Mersey will never be cleaned up?

Mr. Baker: I have already said in reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) that the Mersey scheme, to which I attach a great deal of importance—£4 billion has been spent on it over 20 years—will continue.

The river will be cleaned up, not just where it passes through Liverpool, but as it passes through Salford and into the rivers of the north-west.

Sir John Page (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend assure the country and the House that when he is preparing his legislation he will keep price, quality of water and quality of service to the customer uppermost in his mind?

Mr. Baker: I can give my hon. Friend a complete assurance. As I have already said, the regulatory regime which we envisage will relate precisely to price and will inter link with standards of quality and standards of service. Also, on a point which has been raised again and again this afternoon, we will maintain public health standards.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Is the Secretary of State aware that there has never been any profit in cleaning up pollution but only in creating pollution? Wherever water is provided overseas by private concerns, one has to buy bottles of water in the shops to make sure that one is not poisoned. After the Government have implemented this policy, the advice which will be given to visitors to this country will be, "There are two things which you must beware: do not drink the water and do not breathe the air."

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that whenever one goes overseas it is necessary to drink bottled water in order to drink pure water, he cannot have travelled

[Mr. Baker]

widely recently. The standards of water purity will be preserved. They will have statutory backing and will come under parliamentary procedure for the first time.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be a warm welcome in my constituency for his announcement? It will be hoped that more equitable charges will be established. The Forest of Dean is serviced by the Welsh water authority and the Severn-Trent water authority. There are large unfair differences between what has to be paid to the Severn-Trent water authority and what has to be paid to the Welsh water authority. Does my right hon. Friend think that this anomaly will be cleared up?

Mr. Baker: The charging regime which will operate after privatisation will be operated through licences issued and policed by the director general of Water Services. He will have powers to vary the licences and for the first time he will be statutorily obliged to receive and deal with direct complaints, not only on prices but on standards of service.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I have carefully noted those hon. Members who have not been called, and I will give them precedence when this matter is next discussed.

Welsh Water Authority (Privatisation)

4.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the privatisation of the Welsh water authority.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has told the House, the Government have decided to transfer the water authorities in England and Wales to private ownership and a White Paper setting out our proposals has been presented to Parliament. The House will be aware that the water authorities in England and Wales were established so that a single body controls water and sewerage in river catchment areas; and that the Welsh water authority excludes that part of mid-Wales which drains into the Severn, but covers those parts of England that drain into the Wye and Dee.

During the consultation that followed the publication of our discussion paper last April, the Welsh water authority urged that the present integrated river basin management should continue if the industry was privatised. We agree with that recommendation and the authority will therefore be privatised with its existing boundaries and functions intact, with the exception of the co-ordination and financing of flood defence and land drainage. The privatised Welsh water company will operate under a licence from the new director general of water services, who will lay down strict conditions on pricing and service standards. The director general will appoint a regional consumer committee representing all consumer interests and in Wales this committee will be assisted by divisional committees. The privatisation of the WWA will, for the first time, enable employees and customers in Wales to have a direct stake in the industry.

The regulatory regime will provide general powers with regard to the supply of water in bulk between undertakings. The right of appeal will remain when water undertakers are unable to agree terms for such transfers, but this will be to the director general, rather than the Secretary of State. In determining appeals he will apply the same general principles as apply to other aspects of charging policy, in that charges should be cost-related and should not be discriminatory.

Considerable progress has been made since the authority was reorganised in 1982. Services and efficiency have been greatly improved and a large investment programme undertaken. I pay tribute to the chairman, board and employees for these achievements. I believe that privatisation will enable them to get on with their job with greater freedom and without the constraints on financing which public ownership imposes. Customers will benefit from the improving service that will result.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): First, I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones).

I have listened to the Secretary of State this afternoon. I am profoundly disturbed by his proposals about the water supply in Wales. Water is a basic amenity and one does not need to be a political extremist to believe that its proper place is in the public sector, under democratic control. I appreciate that strictly regulated and controlled private water companies exist, but water should not be subject to the vagaries of the market place, as these proposals envisage.

The Welsh water authority and its chairman Mr. John Elfed Jones, oppose privatisation. They believe that it would be inefficient and cumbersomely administered. Rural areas would certainly suffer, because the Welsh water authority provides jobs in those areas, many of which are heavily blighted by economic conditions. Charges could escalate in rural areas as a result of these proposals.

The trade unions in the water industry oppose the proposals. That applies to white-collar workers, essentially represented by the National and Local Government Officers Association, and by the operatives represented essentially by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union. They are not seduced by the glossy promises of shareholdings. They appreciate the puny percentage that went to the employees of British Telecom. Water authority workers have cause for concern about their pension rights. They bear in mind the recent experience of busmen as a result of transport legislation. They now appreciate the difficulties affecting workers in the gas industry.

The Welsh water authority has already experienced many turbulent and highly expensive reorganisation schemes. Likewise, the Government have changed the method of accounting for the water industry, which has forced charges up, yet restricted borrowing and investment. All these measures have sent prices rocketing and, of course, it is the consumers who have to pay.

The Government's actions are underhand, to say the least. They have been preparing the groundwork for privatisation. These proposals are yet another example of selling the assets of the nation to fill the Treasury's coffers in order to bribe the electorate so as to secure a Tory victory at the next general election.

It is estimated that the sale of the water assets throughout the country could raise between £3 billion and £5 billion — even more than the flotation of British Telecom. The Secretary of State for Wales is part and parcel of this sordid exercise. Once again, he is selling Wales short. The Opposition will oppose these proposals through all the avenues open to us.

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will oppose these proposals, just as he has opposed every constructive proposal that has been presented to the House in my time.

The hon. Gentleman said that the water authorities' proper place is in the public sector, but he did not attempt to substantiate that statement. He admitted that many water authorities run perfectly well in the private sector under strict regulatory control, as in the United States and France.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the vagaries of the market place. The market place will be a powerful factor in improving efficiency. It will set a standard against which efficiency can be measured. The performance of authorities is best measured by the market.

There is absolutely no reason why charges should escalate. Professor Littlechild shows convincingly why the proposed regime for controlling prices and services should result in lower charges, which will be passed on to the consumer.

The hon. Gentleman asked about employees' rights. They will be protected. I am sure that many employees will welcome the opportunity to share in the enterprise in which they work, just as many employees have a share in British Telecom. Pension rights to which they have contributed will be safeguarded.

The hon. Gentleman said that charges had risen. If they have, it is to pay for the massive capital programme being undertaken by the Welsh water authority following the neglect and capital cuts initiated by the Labour Government. It will be possible to raise money in the markets more cheaply and with greater freedom than under the present arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the views of the chairman of the Welsh water authority. I have discussed the matter with him. He told me that privatisation and the removal of Welsh water from the constraints of Government financial controls offers opportunities for wider share ownership among employees and customers, and that the benefits will be passed on in higher standards of service, which can be protected adequately under these arrangements. The chairman also tells me that he hopes that Welsh water will be one of the first in the queue for privatisation.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I again remind the House of the time constraints today. I shall have to limit questions on this statement until 4.45 pm.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my right hon. Friend have general ministerial responsibility for this service and for some ancillary matters such as the protection of the coast and sewerage?

Mr. Edwards: Yes. The licensing and direct control of services will lie with the director general. He will appoint local consultative committees. At present they are appointed by the water authorities. This is a clear advance in consumer representation. Land drainage continues to be publicly financed, and the proposed changes do not alter my responsibilities.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Can the right hon. Gentleman name any reputable public body in Wales which has expressed its support for this proposition? If so, it would be contemptible support for a contemptible proposal.

Mr. Edwards: I see no reason to describe as contemptible a proposal which improves the freedom of water authorities to operate without detailed financial constraints such as they operate under at present, which will improve water and pollution standards, and which will improve the consultative regime and allow the Welsh people to own shares in the enterprise.

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): For the foreseeable future, many water consumers in Wales will continue to be anxious about charges. Can my right hon. Friend say whether we can look forward to charge increases remaining within or below the rate of inflation?

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that the regime will help to improve the efficiency of authorities and therefore to reduce charges. When my hon. Friend reads Professor Littlechild's recommendations, he will see that they are based on RPI-X. That is the proposal on which the pricing arrangements will be based.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I listened with interest to the Secretary of State's statement about the privatisation of the Welsh water

[Mr. Geraint Howells]

authority. My only comment is that it is a scandal that he is prepared to connive at the disposal of yet another priceless national asset.

What will happen to the inherited and present debt of the Welsh water authority, which amounts to about £440 million? Can the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance to the elderly, the young and the needy in Wales that they will not pay more for their water supply after privatisation? Will he tell the House what the prospects are for those currently employed by the Welsh water authority?

Mr. Edwards: I have already given assurances about employees. I am sure that the proposed arrangements will improve efficiency and lower costs.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a priceless national asset. I am sure that members of the public will wish to have direct ownership of and participation in that. He referred to the capital position of the authority with respect to inherited debt. In order to bring the authority to the market there will have to be careful financial restructuring, and that will involve rearrangements for capital debt. If the hon. Gentleman reads Professor Littlechild's report, he will note that that is one of the matters that we will have to consider for each water authority, so that they come to the market on a sensible basis.

I have made that matter perfectly clear to the chairman of the Welsh water authority, and I am sure that that is one reason why he has substantially changed his views since he first heard the suggestion and feared that the changes would go ahead on the basis of the existing capital debt —something that has been the subject of concern in the Select Committee and elsewhere for a long time.

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware that swapping a private monopoly for a public monopoly is not necessarily an advantage? It will be rather difficult to convince many people that it is. Who will compete to supply my home with water?

Mr. Edwards: If my hon. Friend reads the report of Professor Littlechild, he will recognise that there are real advantages to be gained and that many will be passed on to the consumer. Not least, the performance of the authority will be measured in the market place, and the performance of management will be judged in the market place when it wishes to raise finance. There is also always the threat of takeover by another authority as an inducement to better management. In the competitive service between authorities there will be a real inducement to improve efficiency, even in the monopoly referred to by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): The right hon. Gentleman knows that the industrial and housing development in Llantrisant in my constituency has been harmed by inadequate sewerage facilities for many years. Does that not point to greater local responsibility for the Welsh water authority, rather than to the lesser responsibility in the proposals? How will market forces ensure that the sewage works, when finally built, will be properly constructed on a greenfield site rather than cheek by jowl with a built-up area?

Mr. Edwards: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that problems with private owners have held up that development. I do not think that the fault lies with the Welsh water authority.

The shortcomings in the sewerage arrangements that will be inherited from the state-owned body should be easier to overcome because it will be easier for the new authority to raise money in the market without annual financial constraints from the Treasury, which will make it easier to provide facilities of the sort which the hon. Gentleman rightly desires for his constituents.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend assure my worried constituents that the privatised water authority will not emulate British Telecom in devising a charging structure that benefits the large users to the detriment of the small users?

Mr. Edwards: I see absolutely no reason why that matter cannot and will not be adequately covered by the director general and by the proposed licensing regime.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): May I bring the Secretary of State to the bottom line of this question? Is it not the truth that the net assets of the Welsh water authority are £1,600 million, and the current return 1·5 per cent., giving a profit of £24 million? Thus, to obtain a return in the market place that will make the investment attractive, will it not be necessary either to double the charges made by the authority to bring in an additional £140 million a year or to sell the assets at a fraction of their real value, making it an asset-stripping giveaway? Which of those does the Secretary of State think is likely to happen?

Mr. Edwards: I find that question curious coming from someone who, over a long period, has repeatedly, asked that we should write off the inherited capital debt.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Is my right hon. Friend aware that when the chairman of the Welsh water authority gave evidence to the Select Committee during its inquiry into coastal sewage pollution, he said that because of the strong nature and longevity of the infrastructure there was a strong argument that the authority should borrow more? Would not privatisation enable the authority to do just that? Could not the authority then free itself from financial restraints, such as the external financing limit, and accelerate its £75 million programme of outflow replacement?

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend is right on every point. The chairman of the authority wants to get on with the capital programme and therefore is anxious that privatisation should come sooner rather than later.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): The Secretary of State chastised my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for voting against so-called constructive proposals. May I remind him that in a previous Parliament he voted for the present arrangements?

How does the right hon. Gentleman expect flood protection schemes, which are a community service, to be carried out by a private concern? How does he think sewerage management — I am concerned about the Neath trans-sewage scheme — will be carried out by private companies?

Mr. Edwards: I see no reason why, under the licensing arrangements, sewage cannot be properly and effectively

controlled. Flood defence and land drainage will be managed by separate public bodies, and their financing and control will remain with the public sector.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the transfer of the appointment of the consumer representative body from the state-owned water authority to the independent director general, together with increased powers for those consumer bodies, will represent much a superior and truly independent system?

Mr. Edwards: There will be a real advance in consumer representation arrangements. Many people have long complained that authorities appoint their own consumer bodies. The fact that they will in future be appointed by an independent director general will be a considerable advance.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): What powers will be available to the successor private companies to require the installation of domestic meters, against the wishes of individual home owners?

Mr. Edwards: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said earlier, we intend to conduct experiments on metering. We have already issued a consultative document and we will have to see how the experiment works before we take any final decisions on the eventual introduction of metering on a large scale. However, a considerable number of Welsh water authority customers have already chosen to meter, and a significant number have transferred to that during the past 12 months.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): How many privately owned houses in Wales are served by unadopted sewers? Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that those houses will be made up to public sewerage standards before privatisation? Thirdly, will he ensure that there is a separate Bill for Wales and the Welsh water authority?

Mr. Edwards: There will be one Bill to cover England and Wales.

I am sorry that the existing authority and its predecessors have left arrangements for unadopted sewers which the hon. Gentleman considers unsatisfactory. There is nothing in the proposals that will change the existing position.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I do not disbelieve the Secretary of State's account of his conversation with the chairman of the Welsh water authority, but is he aware that 70 minutes ago I had a conversation with the chief executive of the Welsh water authority, who said:

"The Welsh Water Authority as a whole can see no benefit for the consumer in privatisation."?

This is not the first time that the Welsh water authority has spoken with two heads. Which is the true head?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Lady will know that when we consulted on this matter some time ago the authority said that, on balance, it could not see any great gains from the proposals to privatise. It believed that there would be greater freedom and thought that there would be some anxieties. Since then, I have discussed these matters with the chairman and I have spoken to him today. I too can quote, because I wrote down his words myself. The chairman believes that the proposals offer a real opportunity to maximise the benefits of the business for employees and customers. I believe that the chairman is absolutely right.

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): In view of the almost total anti-privatisation need, well documented in a memorandum produced by the chairman of the Welsh water authority less than a year ago, would it now be the honourable thing for the Minister to sack his handmaiden and his hand-picked board?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman should look at the evidence given on this matter to the Select Committee. He will discover that as the proposals have clarified themselves, and as the members of the authority board have begun to see what the Government intend on capital reorganisation, licensing and control systems and the proposals set out in the Littlechild report, they have begun to realise that there are real advantages. I repeat that the chairman believes that it is to the authority's advantage that it should be privatised sooner rather than later.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I am surprised that the Secretary of State prays in aid the evidence of the Select Commitee report. The Select Committee sat for 18 months preparing a report which he rejected on the Floor of the House. Therefore, for him to pray in aid some of its points is wrong. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) said, the statements made in the report were subject to amendment by the chairman, John Elfed Jones, whom the Secretary of State appointed to the Welsh water authority, and by other appointees who have declared their opposition to privatisation.

I am concerned about the limiting of charges for customers. Only 12 months ago, a system of streamlining charges was introduced, which increased charges to the poorer rated areas in Wales, particularly in my constituency, where mining valley communities are paying twice the water rate that they were paying in 1973. I am further concerned about the new proposals limiting charges, under section 62(4) of the regulations for customer protection. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will do something about that.

Mr. Edwards: I have already referred to the evidence given by the chairman to the Select Committee, who made it clear that it would be attractive to have the freedom to borrow according to the means of the authority. He was concerned about the regulatory aspects, and the way that we are dealing with those has now been spelt out. The regime that I have described, with the director general and licensing arrangements, will provide safeguards for individual householders and for the pricing system, which will be at least as good as, and in many respects better than, any arrangements in force now.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): The Secretary of State will know that I represent the constituency where the headquarters of the Welsh water authority is situated. I can confirm that the management is opposed to privatisation of the authority. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that after privatisation the Welsh water authority headquarters will remain in Brecon and that local employment will be protected?

Mr. Edwards: That will be entirely a matter for the organisation, but I see no reason why it should wish to move, particularly as it is going ahead with the construction of new headquarters there.

Points of Order

4.44 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is always keen to debate matters of public concern. I raised earlier a question about the news that there has been a nuclear fuel leak at Sellafield and that all bar the emergency staff from one part of the building have been evacuated. In view of that, has anybody contacted your office, Mr. Speaker, about the Government making a statement on this issue either today or as soon as possible? This is a matter of great public concern. Therefore, it would be a good thing if we were able to shed a little more light on the subject.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise, first, because my constituency is involved and, secondly, because I speak for the Opposition on these matters. This is a matter of concern. I have called for an immediate statement from the management and I have a copy of that report here, although I shall not detain the House by reading it. I am assured that the appropriate regulatory authorities have been notified of the incident, that no-one has been damaged and that there has been no release of radiation to the environment. I put it on record now that we shall be considering further information in due course, and I might, on behalf of the Opposition, be calling for a statement tomorrow from the Government.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister opened the statement by saying "With permission". I understand that it is with your permission, Mr. Speaker, that Ministers make statements to the House. Today, we have a controversial Supply Day and the Government have deliberately chosen to eat into its time by making a statement on another controversial matter, which may knock British Leyland out of the headlines. When the Government do that deliberately as part of their news management, should you not refuse that permission, Mr. Speaker, and let them come another day?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The "with permission" preamble is nothing to do with me. As I understand it, it is purely a convention. Unfortunately, I have no power to refuse to listen to a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order arising out of questions to the Secretary of State, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the Secretary of State deliberately misled the House and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has not deliberately misled the House.

Mr. Powell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Only you can decide on and interpret this.

Over the past few months we have had a sufficient number of mis-statements, incidents of the House being misled, and on occasions deliberately lied to.

Mr. Speaker: Not in this House. The hon. Gentleman knows that everyone in the House is equally honourable, so we do not lie to each other.

Mr. Powell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am not referring to a particular case. I am suggesting that the House has been misled by the Secretary of State on the determination of the chairman of the Welsh water authority and his board about privatisation of water.

Mr. Speaker: I have no knowledge of these matters. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can pursue them at Welsh Question Time.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have had two statements, one relating to England and one to Wales, on an important matter that will bring immense benefit to people living in those areas. Have you had any intimation from the Scottish Office that we are to know what the proposals for Scotland are? I appreciate that there water is the responsibility of the local authorities.

Mr. Speaker: No intimation has been made to me.

Sellafield (Spent Fuel Discharge)

4.47 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the discharge of spent fuel at Sellafield causing danger to people."—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are under great pressure today because of subsequent debates. The hon. Gentleman is within his rights to make a Standing Order No. 10 application but I hope that he will do it briefly.

Mr. Hughes: The request is specific because, as I think that you are aware, Mr. Speaker, there was an incident at 11.45 this morning in the chemical separation complex at Sellafield, when radiation leaked, as has been confirmed by a spokesman for British Nuclear Fuels plc. Staff have been evacuated——

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot take points of order during a Standing Order No. 10 application. I shall take it afterwards.

Mr. Hughes: The matter is important because the spokesman for BNFL has said that there has been a release of radiation into the air and the incident, in his words, was "very unusual". The House takes a serious view, as it has always done, of such incidents.

Finally, it is urgent because BNFL has refused to confirm or deny the report that the cause of the leak was the spillage of spent nuclear fuel.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to rule that this matter can be debated under Standing Order No. 10 tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the discharge of spent fuel at Sellafield causing danger to people".

I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said and the points of order earlier. I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10 and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

People's Right to Fuel

4.50 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prevent disconnections of domestic fuel supply in cases of hardship; to introduce a comprehensive system of fuel allowances taking into account climatic variations between different parts of the United Kingdom; and for related purposes.

This is my fourth attempt to introduce such a Bill, and the need for it is now greater than ever. Last year throughout Britain 146,000 households had their electricity or gas supply disconnected, compared with the previous year's total of 134,000. That represents an increase of 9 per cent. Those figures are a national scandal and represent an aggregate of human misery for thousands of families.

Recently, the Policy Studies Institute conducted a survey of disconnection cases, and discovered that 90 per cent. fell within the special categories of people specifically mentioned in the existing voluntary code of practice. They include people receiving supplementary benefit, family income supplement, and unemployment benefit, retirement pensioners, the blind, the sick, the disabled and families with young children. Therefore, it is clear that the existing voluntary code of practice is not working. People need statutory protection. My Bill aims to replace the existing voluntary code of practice with a statutory code.

The fuel boards would require a court order before they could disconnect domestic fuel supplies, and any disconnections without a court order would be illegal. It is illegal for a landlord to evict a tenant without a court order, so surely it should be illegal for a fuel board to disconnect fuel supplies without a court order.

My Bill would also provide for early statutory liaison between the board and the consumer to identify debt problems at an early stage. If necessary, that early liaison would also extend to the Department of Health and Social Security and the social work department, if the consumer came within their responsibility. An arrangement could then be worked out at an earlier stage for easier payments by instalments. The Bill would extend the present fuel-direct scheme which applies to people on supplementary benefit. Anyone receiving any DHSS benefit would have the opportunity to pay their fuel bill directly from their benefits, if they wished. Similarly, people would have the right to have a pre-payment meter, if they wished, unless there were compelling reasons of safety or security.

My Bill also intends to tackle the root cause of disconnections — the widespread incidence of fuel poverty. That has been caused, or at least exacerbated, by the Government's fuel pricing policy. Since 1979, when the Government came to power, gas prices have increased by 131·6 per cent. and electricity prices by 93·7 per cent. Both figures are well above the rate of inflation, as measured by the retail prices index. If British Gas is privatised, the position will become worse, not better, because a publicly owned enterprise will be replaced by a private monopoly run by people whose motivation is to maximise profits, rather than to give the best service to consumers.

The Bill would introduce a comprehensive system of fuel allowances. At present some assistance is available to some people on supplementary benefit. In most cases the additional heating allowance works out at £2·20 a week,

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

which would not buy even half a bag of coal, and would not go far towards meeting electricity or gas bills. Recently, particularly in Scotland, we witnessed a justified public outrage about the severe weather extra heating allowance, when people in colder climes—in Scotland and the north of England—were deprived of that allowance while those in the warmer climes in the south received the allowance. I understand that under the new DHSS proposals that allowance is likely to be scrapped completely.

The aim of the Bill is to introduce a fairer, more comprehensive scheme of fuel allowances tied to housing benefit, so that anyone receiving housing benefit would also receive a fuel allowance. Surely if people are entitled to a subsidy for a roof over their heads, we must accept that a house is not a home without heating and lighting. A further advantage of tying the allowance to housing benefit is that it would avoid the need for another means test. The exact amount of fuel allowance would depend on the financial and domestic circumstances of the consumer, and the climate of the area in which the consumer resides.

It has been estimated that it costs 28 per cent. more to heat a house in Scotland than in the south of England. That may explain in part why the number of disconnections is proportionately higher in Scotland than in the south. Fuel poverty causes hardship and leads to serious health risks, especially for old people and young children. Low temperatures and dampness cause or exacerbate conditions such as bronchitis, pneumonia and hypothermia. Every year about 50,000 more old people die in the winter months than in the summer months, and the quarter between January and March accounts for nearly half of the annual total of post-neonatal deaths. Many of the deaths could be prevented, if we could eradicate fuel poverty. My Bill is a charter to do that. Therefore, I ask the House to support me, and I ask the Government to grant time for further progress.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. Ernie Ross, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. David Winnick, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. Michael Welsh, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Martin Flannery, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and Mr. Bob Clay.

PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO FUEL

Mr. Dennis Canavan accordingly presented a Bill to prevent disconnections of domestic fuel supply in cases of hardship; to introduce a comprehensive system of fuel allowances taking into account climatic variations between different parts of the United Kingdom; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 February and to be printed. [Bill 77.]

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

British Leyland

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I should like to repeat what I said earlier. There is great pressure to speak in this important debate. May I say to both Front Benchers and Back Benchers that this is a day on which brief contributions will be very much to the benefit of other hon. Members.

4.58 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the willingness of the Government to dispose of British Leyland's commercial vehicle enterprises, which will lead to substantial job losses in vehicle construction and motor components manufacturing, the loss of independent British capability in design, research and development and a further damaging reduction in Britain's manufacturing base; and calls upon the Government to abandon forthwith its proposals to sell off Austin Rover Group, the last remaining British owned volume car producer.

Before I embark on what I hope will be a brief contribution, may I, on behalf of the Opposition, express our dismay at the way in which the Government arranged to make two statements on the afternoon when this important debate was to be held. The Government's strategy—I know that it has nothing to do with you, Mr. Speaker; it is entirely a matter for the Government's business managers—is crystal clear. They want to push this debate as far as possible into the afternoon so that it will not be reported in the news bulletins at 5 pm and 6 pm. The Government may be able to obfuscate matters temporarily by these stratagems, but they cannot escape responsibility for what we extracted from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry last Monday. The right hon. Gentleman was forced to come to the House to confirm the fears that were expressed in Birmingham at the weekend by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). What the Secretary of State said was sufficiently informative for us to discover that the Government have in mind a plan to sell off Leyland Trucks and Land Rover to General Motors and to dispose of Leyland Bus to the Laird Group. We know that talks are taking place with Ford, and perhaps others, on the future of the Austin Rover Group.

This debate is timely because, now that we have flushed the Government's intentions out of them, Parliament and the country have an opportunity to express their views before these matters are finally decided, although we are told that they are at an advanced stage. The Government have hopelessly miscalculated public opinion on this matter. The representations flooding in from all over the country, especially the west midlands, are ample testimony to that.

I start in the hope that what is said in the debate by hon. Members on both sides of the House will influence Government opinion so that the Government will desist from the course of action on which they have embarked. I begin with Leyland Trucks. It is well known that General Motors has been looking for an acquisition in western Europe. It has been to Spain and West Germany, although

it is significant that no one even thinks that it might go to France. The French would never consider such a proposition from General Motors. The company has been rebuffed, or its discussions have not been fruitful, so it has come to the soft touch of western Europe — Britain under this Government.

General Motors' purpose, as with most such multinationals, is to promote its parent company's strategy for gaining a world market share and maximising its long-term profits. As part of that strategy, General Motors may indeed carry out manufacturing in the countries in which it trades — either real manufacturing or assembling. It may even carry out research and development, depending on how it suits the company. Let us never forget, however, that in companies such as General Motors policy will be decided at home — in Detroit, or, in the case of GM world bus and truck division, in Pontiac in Michigan. Most of the profits will flow back to the home of the parent company. Once the company has knocked out or taken over competition, it is free to shift the balance of investment in plant or research towards home or markets elsewhere.

I do not doubt that the proposal makes a great deal of sense for General Motors. First, it will eliminate a significant competitor. Secondly, after GM has knocked out that competitor, it will gain the market share that Leyland Vehicles held. Thirdly—this is an extra bonus — it will obtain access to splendid new plant and equipment which has been provided at public expense at more than £300 million.

It makes sense for General Motors. But what are the consequences for Britain? It is clear that there will be heavy redundancies. In the case of Leyland Vehicles, if the acquisition goes ahead, there will either be rationalisation at the Bedford end or redundancies at the Leyland end. Whatever happens, there will be high unemployment and another addition to the remorselessly rising unemployment total.

When the Government tell us that there has been a new increase in unemployment, almost in tones of puzzlement as to the reasons, they should remember that unemployment increases so relentlessly because of decisions such as this—the relentless closure of plant after plant from one end of this country to the other.

The proposal will result in the elimination of one more important British industrial centre and a further reduction in our manufacturing base, with serious consequences for Britain.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that there is some common ground, in the sense that there is a serious over-capacity problem, both in heavy vehicle manufacturing and in private cars, not only in Britain but throughout Europe? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman therefore agree that, whichever solution is adopted, the problem must be dealt with?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is common knowledge that there is an over-capacity in car and bus manufacturing in western Europe. But why, when these matters arise, is it always Britain that has to give up its share of the car market? Why do the Government not learn to compete rather than surrender?

Land Rover is being put into the deal as a sweetener, if you please, to induce GM to take over Leyland Vehicles for a song. No doubt it will be asked to pay some small contribution to acquire Land Rover. Land Rover is one of the United Kingdom's most successful products which is reckoned throughout the world as a triumph for British engineering, marketing and industrial success. That product is to be Americanised. However, last Monday, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told us that we do not need to worry too much because special assurances will be given that the British marque will be maintained. We do not need to worry—the products will be owned and sold by GM and the profits will go to America but there will be a token Union Jack on the Land Rovers that are sold around the world to remind people that the product was once British.

It is disgraceful that this important product is dealt with in this way. That was one of the assurances that the Secretary of State gave us, but we have heard other assurances from Ministers at the Dispatch Box. Only a week or two ago, the former Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), gave us assurances on behalf of Sikorsky-Fiat, saying that the product would be British researched and designed and that there would be an independent British capability and British independent managerial influence. We have had assurance after assurance. Conservative Ministers find themselves continually coming to the Dispatch Box and giving assurances on behalf of American companies. [HON. MEMBERS: "Labour is anti-American."] The feeling in the House is not that the House is anti-American but that the Government are anti-British.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well, because he is a keen student of these matters. The bus market has collapsed because of the Government's transport policy. First, we had deregulation, then privatisation and then rate capping — three hammer blows at the bus industry, completely knocking the bottom out of demand for public sector buses. Why do the Government not change their transport policies instead of sacrificing yet another important British company on the altar of their dogmatism?

Once again, there will be an inevitable loss of jobs because, if the Laird Group and Leyland Buses come together, redundancies will occur at either or perhaps both plants. Again, there will be a loss — Britain will have moved out of another important industrial centre.

The problem arises not just in primary manufacturing. All hon. Members who represent seats in the west midlands, the black country and throughout the rest of Britain will know of the crucial importance of the components industry. For every man who stands on a production line in a car plant, there are seven others whose jobs depend on his work. With the shrinking in size of the manufacturing base which these changes imply, the market for components is bound to diminish to a large extent. Perhaps even more importantly, the loss of British control will operate sadly to the detriment of those people. British Leyland buys British — 92 per cent. of the components it buys come from British companies. That is British Leyland's settled and firm policy. The component manufacturers are entitled to, and do, rely on that sure market when investing and deciding for their future.

Let us remind ourselves of the experience that this very Government have had with GM. It was only in October

[Mr. Smith]

1985 that the Secretary of State's predecessor was reported in the *Financial Times* under the heading: "UK content in Vauxhall's too low says Brittan."

The article reads:

"In the most critical public remarks yet made on the subject by a minister, Mr. Leon Brittan, Trade and Industry Secretary, told the Commons he regretted that, 'after lengthy discussions Vauxhall is not yet ready to go further in proving that it really is a British car producer.'"

If that is the position when the company is competing with British firms, what will be the position after it has taken them over?

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): My right hon. and learned Friend has referred to the components industry, but in the area which I represent about 18 per cent. of the special steels produced in Sheffield goes to British Leyland. There is great concern within the steel industry. It has already been treated unfairly by the Government and run down. Any takeover of the firms in question will have a major impact on the steel industry in the area which I represent.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The importance of special steels, especially in the Sheffield area, is well appreciated. However, with respect to my hon. Friend, the importance of the industry extends beyond Sheffield. Strip steel is also involved, and there are many areas in which strip steel production is of great importance.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): In speaking on behalf of my constituency and the port of Southampton, I hate to hear General Motors being denigrated. For many years it has operated a successful factory called AC Delco, in Southampton. The factory continues to produce and it employs many of my constituents. The anti-Americanism that is creeping into our debates is beginning to have an effect on the company's future expansion plans. I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will bear that in mind.

Mr. Smith: That is a curious definition of anti-Americanism. Are we being anti-American when we object to our own industries being sold out for a song to American multinationals? If that is to be defined as anti-Americanism, I hope that the majority of the House will share the view that I have expressed. I do not seek to denigrate General Motors. I think that the company has acted intelligently in its own interests. I seek to denigrate our negligent Government.

We know from its track record that the assurances of General Motors raise some doubts when we come to consider whether they can be relied upon. All those who are employed in the components industry——

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I shall not give way. I have given way frequently already in what is a short debate.

I am sure that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have received letters today from components companies in the west midlands. I shall quote from one which I received. I shall not name the company because I do not have its permission to do so, but — *[Interruption.]* Very well, I shall name it. I must free myself from the inhibitions arising from my wish to be fair to all concerned. In the interests of Conservative Members, I shall tell them that I received the letter from Concentric plc of Sutton Coldfield. I think that many hon. Members will know that it is an important firm. The author of the letter wrote to me in the knowledge that the debate was to take place, and welcomed the fact. The letter reads:

"There is no doubt in our minds that should the decision-making process for BL leave these shores, then the future of this group is in dire problems. Not only for the 10% of sales with BL but because the whole manufacturing infrastructure that we require to make all our products will slowly disappear.

Our considerable success in overseas markets can only be sustained with a home market base. Our very considerable innovative ability can only be sustained if there is market opportunity.

In the particular of course GM and Ford have pursued a policy in recent years that have contributed more than most to our industrial problems here."

The final paragraph reads:

"Whilst we are concerned about work for the unskilled in the short term, we are more concerned for the opportunity for people of vision and innovation to be able to create more work in the future."

That is an unsolicited letter from a concerned company, and it goes right to the heart of the matter.

As we are short of time, I shall not go into the important defence considerations which arise. Some of them were referred to yesterday, and I have no doubt that others will refer to them again this evening. These considerations involve Land Rovers through to tank transporters. In future, the British Army will be dependent on a foreign supplier.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my right hon. and learned Friend—*[Interruption.]* In this instance we are either all friends together or we are all lost on the motorway. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that over 90 per cent. of British Leyland's products are made from British components, whereas British components comprise only 68 per cent. of the products of the Ford Motor Company? I do not seek to denigrate Ford but now that it is closing down its forges in this country and transferring forging operations to Germany, British components will comprise only 63 per cent. of its products next year. Why should it treat British Leyland and the British people any better than that?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is to be congratulated on seeing these issues so clearly and on speaking about them so well. I hope that he will continue to do so. I am sure that he knows—I hope that this is appreciated by Conservative Members generally — that the concern about this matter crosses party divisions and has spread throughout the country. The Government are only just beginning to discover the depth of feeling that exists in non-industrial as well as industrial areas.

I turn, finally, to the proposals for the Austin Rover Group——

Mr. Grylls *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I shall not give way. I have given way frequently in this short debate.

Mr. Grylls *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. It is obvious that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is not giving way. Interventions, especially from those who are waiting to catch my eye, will make it more difficult to call all those who wish to participate in the debate.

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State did not tell us very much about the Austin Rover Group on Monday. However, on television, a few minutes after he left the Chamber, the information was tumbling out of him that the Government had sanctioned talks between Austin Rover and Ford. That must have come as a considerable shock to most of the country.

When the Prime Minister was asked about the matter yesterday, all she had to tell us was that £2 billion had been committed to the British Leyland Group. She kept telling us about the Varley-Marshall guarantees of £1·5 billion. The right hon. Lady knows perfectly well—if she does not, she should—that not a ha'penny has been paid under the Varley-Marshall guarantees. They would be called upon only in the liquidation of the company.

The Prime Minister might have said—*[Interruption.]* I hope that Conservative Back Benchers who find these matters amusing will remember that not one penny piece has gone from the taxpayer to the Austin Rover Group in the past two years. The Prime Minister did not find time to mention that. Why did she have to tell us about the money that has been invested in British Leyland when asked about these matters without once managing a word of praise for the success story of the Austin Rover Group over the past two-and-a-half years? She demonstrated no pride in the British achievement that turned the Austin Rover Group round to a successful future.

I accept that there was substantial public investment in the group. There should have been and there was. There was a considerable investment of capital and there was also a great sacrifice. Thousands lost their jobs and livelihoods in the remodelling of the group.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The investment and sacrifice will have been made for nothing if they are disregarded at the moment when the results of both are coming to fruition. This is not the time to sell the Austin Rover Group. The notion is gaining currency that the Government are willing to dispose of the group to almost any purchaser, such as Ford, Honda or General Motors. It seems that they would be willing to dispose of it to any company which wishes to take it off the Government's hands, which suggests that they regard it as a terrible liability.

This is the time to support, not sell, the Austin Rover Group. We must support it through to success. If there is a tie-up with Ford, that will smash the strategy that has been devised with Honda. It will mean that the strategy of launching the new Rover 800 — one of the most important of all initiatives — cannot be sustained. If there is a tie-up with Ford, Ford will want to replace Austin Rover's engines with Ford engines. The Austin Rover Group will not be able to maintain its independent capability realistically unless it proceeds on its present course.

Of course, Austin Rover will have to collaborate. All car companies have to collaborate from time to time in the modern world. It must be understood that collaboration is quite different from surrender and capitulation, which is likely to be the result if the current talks continue. That is why we ask in our motion that the talks be ended forthwith. The Government should say quite clearly that there is no point in any discussions taking place. I understand that the executives of the Austin Rover Group are being forced to conduct discussions with Ford. There is no enthusiasm to do so. Indeed, there is outright hostility to the talks among those who manage and run the company. However, they are being forced to conduct negotiations.

The motor car industry is not, as many mistakenly assume, old and dying. It is part of our manufacturing base. It cannot be allowed to be closed down and to disappear. The development of CADCAM and robotics means that the motor car industry is the most important market for the modern elecronics industry. Without markets, industries die. If we eliminate the market that is created by the motor car industry, we shall kill our electronics industry as well. It is an industry in which we must resolve to stay because we will have none of the services if we do not have the manufacturing base which provides the market for them and which provides the wealth which sustains our wages and standard of living. Therefore, we must resolve to stay in an industry which, because of those technical changes, will permit us to operate on the scale of the Austin Rover Group without necessarily having to become a world car outlet. The technology allows a medium-sized operation to be sustained successfully.

We have watched with dismay the collapse of one area after another of our manufacturing industry, to the extent that more than 20 per cent. has disappeared since 1979 and more is clearly going. We are watching that decline and also watching a new development—the way in which our industry is passing into the control and ownership of others.

In his book "Back from the Brink", Sir Michael Edwardes, who played a significant part in the fortunes of the Austin Rover Group, sounded a warning which he said both his successors and Ministers might find relevant, although I do not think he ever thought is would come to pass:

> "The dangers of a link with a multinational would be that BL would become no more than an offshore assembly operation—not even the Right wing of the Conservative party would have been sanguine about that outcome."

Sir Michael Edwardes has more to fear than the Right wing of the Conservative party. We have reached the shameful situation where the British Government are co-operating in making important British industry an "offshore assembly operation".

The country is shocked at the casual way in which the Government have gone about this matter and the easy way in which they shrug off responsibility. The country is shocked at the easy way in which they talk about anti-Americanism and forget about their obligations to be pro-British, and, above all, the country is shocked at the blind dogmatism which prefers a foreign private sector solution to a British national interest. In this episode three elements of Conservative industrial policy are coming together. It always results in a loss of jobs, it always results in permanent loss of plant and it nearly always results in the loss of British independent control.

The depth of feeling is growing in this country. I think that this will be an angry debate because angry people are calling the Government to account for the responsibility they hold. They are letting British industry not only die but pass into the control of others.

5.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'notes with approval the Government's continuing determination to work towards a viable and internationally competitive automotive industry located in the United Kingdom; and endorses the view that, subject to satisfactory terms and conditions, the merger of the commercial vehicle activities of Land Rover, Leyland and Bedford would contribute to that objective and provide the best prospects for secure long-term employment in the industry.'

I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on one point. The motion deals with an extremely important industry in our country, a central part of our manufacturing base, and one of the most important sectors within the economy at large. It employs about 500,000 people directly and in supplying industries, and has a turnover of about £12 billion per annum. Many other thousands of people depend on the prosperity of the motor industry for their livelihood.

The debate should be about how we can best achieve a viable and internationally competitive vehicle industry. How can we make those thousands of jobs more secure and build a better future for this vital industry? We have already put £2·2 billion into BL and we are standing behind another £1·5 billion of additional obligations. I ask the House to take this matter seriously. We have to ask ourselves how much longer we can support the company with taxpayers' money, whether we can continue to have these liabilities indefinitely, and whether there are not other options which should be seriously considered. Any responsible Government would at least want to look at the options.

There are two separate and different issues in the Opposition's motion. The first concerns the future of Land Rover-Leyland, where discussions are at an advanced stage. The second concerns Austin Rover, where discussions with Ford have only recently started and the joint studies are at a very early stage.

Let me start with the first part of the Opposition motion, which addresses the discussions in hand with General Motors on the future of the Bedford and Land Rover-Leyland businesses. I heard the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East say on television that under no circumstances and on no terms should any merger of Bedford and Land Rover-Leyland be contemplated. I believe that that is a shortsighted and ill-judged assessment. Of course, a condition of any sale will have to be satisfactory assurances and I shall return to this later. If a merger should prove to be the best way of creating a strong industry and preserving thousands of jobs in the long term in the companies and the components supply industry——

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy-Speaker. It seems anomalous that we have a new Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box defending the Government on an extremely important subject, but that only one Cabinet Minister is on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy-Speaker. I submit that it is a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The presence of Ministers is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Channon: As I said, if a merger should prove to be the best way of creating a strong industry and preserving thousands of jobs in the companies——

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The Secretary of State is talking about preserving jobs. Will he take into account the experience of David Brown Tractors in my constituency? Six years ago it was sold to an American conglomerate — Case Tenneco International. It then employed 4,000 men and women directly. It now employs 1,100 and that number is diminishing. Is that the pattern which the right hon. Gentleman thinks will save jobs?

Mr. Channon: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my case, he will hear the answer to the question which he and others have been putting.

We are attempting to see what is the best way of preserving jobs in the companies and in the components supply industry — jobs in Bedfordshire, Lancashire, Glasgow and the west midlands. I believe that we have a duty to look objectively at the possible solutions. It is no good putting our heads in the sand and pretending that problems do not exist, or that we can solve them just by throwing taxpayers' money around.

The problems in the commercial vehicle industry are not confined to the United Kingdom. The European commercial vehicle industry has substantial over-capacity. Some have said as much as 40 per cent. over-capacity, and most of the European truck companies are making losses, cutting back capacity and searching for partners. Joint ventures and mergers will increasingly be necessary in order to spread the costs of developing new products and securing economies of scale in manufacturing, marketing and research and development.

As the Labour party's policy document on the motor industry published last year said:

"Collaborative arrangements, providing scale economies and new market outlets, are exactly the strategy which a manufacturer such as Leyland should seek to pursue".

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Channon: The United Kingdom, and British Leyland in particular, cannot be immune from those trends. Land Rover-Leyland and Bedford together made losses of over £120 million in both 1983 and 1984, and there were further substantial losses in 1985. That cannot continue. Some solution has to be found. Capacity has already been cut and plants closed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: No, I will not give way.

Some other strategy has to be followed. It would be a disgrace to allow a withering away of those businesses. A merger, if the terms are right, could be the salvation of both.

Both companies have a strong British tradition and are committed to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): As part of the opportunities which my right hon. Friend is exploring, has any discussion taken place with any European manufacturers, and does he intend to explore that avenue?

Mr. Channon: No discussions have taken place with European manufacturers. I do not think that any European manufacturer would be interested in the proposals which the House is discussing. They both have their European —*[Interruption.]* I had assumed that the House would wish to hear the argument. The Opposition asked for this debate. I imagine that they want to hear the reply. Both of these companies have their European research and development centres in this country. Both of them manufacture all of their European and Third world trucks here. Bedford has manufactured over 4·5 million trucks here since 1931 and has exported over half of them. Bedford has probably been the major supplier of trucks to our defence forces since before the second world war.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Channon: No.

The Bedford company even designed the Churchill tank. One cannot get much more British than that, yet the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East referred to a defence risk. Opposition Members do Bedford Commercial Vehicles and its work force a grave disservice when they denigrate the achievements of GM subsidiaries and imply that a merger with Leyland will leave the United Kingdom with only a screwdriver operation. By combining the strength of those organisations the United Kingdom should have a much better chance of retaining a major manufacturing capability and design base, of winning major export orders and of securing the investment and resources which a company the size of GM can provide and which are so necessary for new products and facilities.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Channon: Exactly the same arguments apply to Freight Rover and Land Rover. Both these companies have worked hard to turn themselves around, and I pay tribute to what has been achieved. Despite these efforts, neither is generating the profits necessary to reinvest in new models and facilities and capture world markets, particularly in the face of Japanese competition. The GM route offers greater financial security, vast research and development and other resources and far easier access to markets, especially in North America, where Land Rover and Range Rover have great market potential, but where Land Rover has no distribution network and would have to spend many millions of pounds setting one up.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: GM's worldwide distribution network——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: No. *[Interruption.]* This is a very short debate.

GM's worldwide distribution network offers even greater opportunities, which I am sure the Land Rover management will seize with enthusiasm if this deal proceeds. Under the GM umbrella, Land Rover will have a more secure future than it currently has or than it could have if it tried to make it on its own.

Mr. John Smith: The Secretary of State is speaking almost as though a deal has been concluded and he is drawing our attention to possible advantages. Since this is a matter of great consequence to all concerned, may we be told whether the Cabinet has discussed it?

Mr. Channon: No deal has been concluded. If the House will allow me to make my speech, it will hear the arguments that I think are important. No decisions have been taken. There are therefore no decisions for the Cabinet to discuss—*[Interruption.]* I get the impression that the Opposition are more interested in shouting me down than in hearing the truth. All they want to do is create a little party political capital out of this rather than to hear the truth about the motor industry.

I want to talk about real jobs and real people, and about the prospects for the company in a hard, commercial world. The board is well aware that, if left to go their own way, the businesses would be small fishes in a pond full of piranhas and that the interrelationship between the various companies would make a separate sale of one part impractical. As such——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: No, I will not.

The future of the component supply industry is essentially tied to the fortunes of the vehicle manufacturers and their success. Before any deal can go forward, we shall need assurances on United Kingdom manufacturing——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: No.

We shall need assurances on United Kingdom manufacturing, research and development, exports, investment and the like. No deal will go forward unless those assurances are forthcoming. The track record of Bedford is a proud one and should give everyone in the industry confidence in the future.

Let me now deal with the other part of the Opposition's motion. As I said at the beginning, discussions between Austin Rover and Ford, which have the full approval of the BL board, are at a very early stage. *[Interruption.]* I repeat to the House, since I am challenged, that the discussions have the full approval of the BL board. However, the small fish in a big pond analogy applies also to Austin Rover.

The House will expect me to pay tribute to the sustained efforts of the management and work force, who have achieved a highly creditable turnround in the performance of the company in recent years. I repeat to the House that from a loss of £266 million in 1980, the company in 1985 was trading around break-even. It has introduced a successful new model range, to which will shortly be added the XX.

The Austin Rover Group exported over 100,000 vehicles in 1985. Without that progress, the prospects for the survival of ARG as a volume car manufacturer would have been very gloomy. Nevertheless, the House must face the fact that the United Kingdom's market share has not grown as all of us had hoped. The European market share remains very small, at 3·9 per cent., and continued taxpayers' support will be necessary to give the company

[Mr. Channon]

even a reasonable chance of keeping its head above water. It is essential that we should now build on this progress——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is Freight Rover to be transferred to the Austin Rover Group?

Mr. Channon: I dealt earlier with Freight Rover and Land Rover.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Gentleman did not do so.

Mr. Channon: Freight Rover is in the same position. It is essential to build upon the progress of the Austin Rover Group and the confidence that it has generated by considering the options for the long-term future.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the car industry is a fast-changing industry. It is at the forefront of technological change, in the use of robotics and electronics, and in the application of new materials, but its structure worldwide is also in the process of change. The age of the self-contained company has gone. Even the giants of the industry feel the need to create links with others. Austin Rover has itself forged links with European manufacturers and buys components from Peugeot and Volkswagen. It also has its design, component supply, manufacturing and marketing links with Honda.

The discussions that have been started with Ford must be seen against that background. They involve an examination of areas of mutual interest to see whether there are links between the two companies which could usefully be exploited to produce scale economies and other benefits based upon European, and specifically British, design and manufacture.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Bearing in mind the pre-eminence of Ford of Europe, what does my right hon. Friend think of the comment of Bob Lutz, the head of Ford of Europe, that Austin Rover is a dead body on a life-support machine? Does my right hon. Friend agree with that comment? Would he like to negotiate with a man who holds that opinion about Austin Rover?

Mr. Channon: As I am trying to explain to the House, the talks with Ford are at a preliminary stage. No decisions of any kind have been taken. When he thinks about Ford's commitment to Britain, my hon. Friend will surely agree that Ford's European headquarters are in Britain and that its major research and development centre is in Britain. Most of its trucks and tractors are manufactured here, with an average United Kingdom content of 80 per cent. The cars that Ford builds in this country have a 78 per cent. United Kingdom content. The company invests about £250 million a year in Britain, employs about 50,000 people directly, and is one of the top 30 employers in the country. I hope that no anti-American feeling will come out of all that.

Ford exports, by value, 20 per cent. more than British Leyland. It manufactures twice as many gear boxes and engines in this country as does BL, with obvious benefits to the United Kingdom component supply industry.

The Labour party document says:

"Ford Uk has been the strongest force in the British car industry for over a decade. . . . As an integral part of Ford of Europe's production system, Ford UK has enormous resources in terms of design, investment and management."

The detailed examination that is now under way may —I emphasise "may"—suggest that a comprehensive merger of the car operations of those strongly British orientated companies would make sense. Perhaps it would make better sense than the alternative "go it alone" policy or other joint ventures and would be more likely to produce a stronger United Kingdom manufacturing base, with more secure long-term job prospects for all. However, it is too early to say. Neither we nor the BL board have closed our minds to other options. I must ask the House to support me in the view that it is ridiculous at this stage to say that we should not even consider the options.

No conclusions have emerged, and no judgments can be made until at least the first stage of the studies is complete. Meanwhile, as I think the House will agree, both Ford and BL recognise the need to reach early conclusions so that the period of uncertainty is reduced to a minimum. If the studies show that a merger could create real benefits and lead to a stronger British industrial base than any other likely options, it would be foolish not to consider the conclusions most seriously.

Despite the undoubted progress that BL has made, it is still a long way from becoming fully viable. As I understand it, the Labour party's answer is to keep BL alive by a drip-feed of taxpayers' money to replace its losses while sheltering behind a wall of protectionism and anti-Americanism. The Labour party is guided by an isolationist mentality which welcomes a Ford or a GM when an engine plant at Bridgend is in prospect. It then emerges from its shell to throw tens of millions of taxpayers' money around in an effort to woo a company which it otherwise pretends it would rather do without.

My concern is to see a viable and internationally competitive motor industry in the United Kingdom. That is the only way in which we can safeguard the thousands of jobs which are dependent upon it. I am determined that every option which offers a way of achieving that should be examined. I urge the House to reject the motion.

5.41 pm

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): We have just heard a statement which amounts to the biggest act of political and industrial treachery that the country has ever heard. The give-away for the Government is the total secrecy with which the negotiations were initiated and have been conducted. The Minister said that the discussions are at an advanced stage. At the end of his speech he even had the impertinence to tell us that we should remove the uncertainty. Can he tell us who initiated the developments? They could not possibly have been initiated by the BL board; they must have been initiated by the Government. The Secretary of State shakes his head. I am willing to give way if he wants to tell us that British Leyland initiated the developments. Who did initiate the developments?

Mr. Channon: Ford approached British Leyland.

Mr. Howell: If Ford approached BL, where did General Motors enter the picture?

Mr. Channon: I do not want to interrupt the right hon. Member, because this is a short debate. There are two issues, GM and Ford. I thought the right hon. Gentleman was talking about the Ford proposal. Ford approached the Government and talks are taking place between Ford and British Leyland.

Mr. Howell: The Secretary of State has still not told us how General Motors entered the act. Was it before or after Ford? The House is entitled to have an answer so that the motives of the Government may become crystal clear.

Whatever view one takes about the merits of the case —I shall express my view about them—the fact that the negotiations are, according tc the Minister, at an advanced stage without any reference to the House and without public discussion can only lead us to believe that the motives of the Government are very low. That is of great importance.

The House will understand the terrible feeling that is already apparent throughout industry in the west midlands, and particularly in Birmingham, and on all sides of the political spectrum. The west midlands has been reduced almost to an industrial wasteland during the last six years, and the position is bound to get worse.

The Minister talked about the components industry, but he has failed to give us an assurance or to set out the minimum terms and conditions for the British content of motor manufacturing which, one hopes, would be legally binding. The Government set great store by such conditions.

There is nothing in the figures available to us to give us confidence in what the Secretary of State has told us. We know that 70 per cent. of vehicles manufactured by Ford in the United Kingdom have an 80 per cent. United Kingdom content; 45 to 56 per cent. of vehicles manufactured by General Motors in the United Kingdom have only a 49 to 50 per cent. United Kingdom content, although the Government hope that that figure will increase. There is no assurance in those figures for the British components industry, which is in a parlous state.

We have evidence before us about Peugeot Talbot. In spite of all that we have been told in the past, we know that at Coventry French components are being used in the manufacture of cars to the detriment of the British components industry. Therefore, the Minister knows perfectly well that he will not be able to come to the House with any legally binding agreement about the minimum percentage of British components if the deals under discussion are concluded.

The House must find out what the atraction is for Ford. In the 1970s the strategy of Ford was to develop a world car; in the 1980s its strategy is to develop a world truck. Design is a key feature in that strategy. The first casualty of any development such as the Minister is examining will be the design potential and capacity of the British motor industry. Some smaller components may be manufactured here, but as centralisation and rationalisation take over, all the components of Ford and General Motors will have to be made to the design of the country of origin, which will not be this country. Therefore, the position of the British components industry will worsen progressively.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that the timing is absolutely appalling. Just when we have had massive investment in the British motor industry and the possibility of a breakthrough for Austin Rover and Land Rover, the Government have initiated takeover talks.

We have not been told by the Government—and I do not suppose we shall be told—about the anticipated job losses. It is only common sense that if Ford and General Motors succeed in their endeavours, there will be standardisation of engines, components and electronics, which must be to the detriment of British manufacturing, and particularly the components industry.

The new Rover 800 has had a successful launch and may emulate the success of Jaguar in the American market. That again brings into question the competence of the Government as well as their strategy in undertaking talks at this time.

Job decline in Birmingham could not be more disastrous. I want the Government to return to the understanding that they cannot divorce the destruction of the British manufacturing industry and the British motor industry from the terrible social consequences that have followed that decline. Anyone who, like me, represents a neighbourhood such as Lozells — it is part of the Lozells-Handsworth syndrome which occupied the attention of the House recently—anyone who has 34·5 per cent. unemployment, anyone who has at least 70 per cent. of school leavers unemployed, and who then sees the rest of manufacturing industry in Birmingham threatened, faces responsibility for the most serious social consequences.

It is no good saying to whole generations of school leavers and young family men——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): And women.

Mr. Howell: —and women—that there is no hope for them and that even the little security that they now have will be sacrified or threatened by a sellout on this scale. Ministers who contemplate that, who fail to provide alternative industries, cut investment in the social programme for housing and schools and now threaten jobs at Austin Rover and Land Rover, deserve heavy censure not only in the House, but in the country.

I pay tribute to Conservative Members from Birmingham and the midlands who have courageously stood up in the past few days, realising that this is not a party political matter but one of the greatest concern for the city and the region. They know perfectly well that the political consequences of this is that all of them and all those people will be consigned to the knacker's yard at the next election. The only qualification that comes out of the Chicago monetarist school is the ability to be a knacker's yard operative.

5.51 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): May I add my congratulations to those which have already been offered to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his appointment. I wrote to him immediately but I want to congratulate him publicly. Having been Secretary of State for Industry, Trade and Regional Development more than 20 years ago, I know that that Department, even though it no longer has regional development, is one of the most difficult and onerous of all the Departments of Government. It is more onerous than that of Chancellor of the Exchequer and I wish him well in it.

The debate today is important because it goes to the heart of Britain's industrial future and the Government's attitude towards it. Therefore, I regret that there should be so few members of the Cabinet on the Government Front Bench.

Many of us have watched the deterioration and erosion of Britain's industrial base over the past few years and we

[Mr. Edward Heath]

have held our peace. History may blame us for that and hold us culpable. But there comes a time when, despite the natterings behind me, one has to protest publicly against the proposed action of the Government towards the motor industry. The business and financial world, quite apart from the members of the Conservative party, are stunned by the revelation that the Government are proposing to sell the remains of the motor industry to American firms.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will not accuse me of being isolationist. I have been accused of many things in my life, but not of being isolationist. Moreover, I hope that he will not accuse me of being anti-American. I first went to the United States in 1939 as a student. I fought alongside the Americans. I have worked closely with four presidents of the United States. I am a great admirer of the Americans. Moreover, I admire what General Motors has done. I well recall one of the most famous phrases in history under President Eisenhower's Administration, that what was good for General Motors was good for America. That may well be true, but it does not follow that what is good for General Motors is good for Britain, and that is what concerns me.

My right hon. Friend accused the Opposition of playing party politics, of wanting everything in public ownership and so on. That is of no concern to me, nor, I think, to many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. What does concern us, I must repeat, is the future of the motor industry and what remains in British hands.

The onus of proof in this case rests on the Government. They cannot try to shift the responsibility on to the boards of the firms. They said that they were doing so in the case of Westland. I have withheld comment on any aspect of Westland so far and I want to make only one now. No Government is justified in wiping its hands of a company which is integral to our defence programme. I am afraid that that is a matter of principle for me. That is all that I want to say about Westland.

The Government are the owner of the motor industry and so they must accept full responsibility for what they do about it. Moreover, two Governments—the Labour Government up to 1979 and this Government—have, apparently, put £2·6 billion into the motor industry. Very well, that is a second reason why the Government must accept full responsibility for what happens in the case that we are discussing tonight.

It has constantly been said that because £2·6 billion has gone into the industry we must make an end of it. On any ordinary business judgment, to have put £2·6 billion into a concern would have given one every justification for carrying on. When my right hon. Friend rightly pays tribute to the workers and the management of the remaining firms and says how well they have done——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: And they have.

Mr. Heath: I agree. But what sort of response is it to say, "Now we will sell you out to the Americans"? It is no response at all for what they have achieved, even if they are not yet perfect and even if they cannot at the moment do without some financial contribution from the Government. The point of having contributed £2·6 billion is that the Government and my right hon. Friend should now continue to do what is necessary to put those firms completely on their feet.

Is that possible? I believe so. But apparently some of my hon. Friends do not. What is this fatalism about the motor industry? What is this despair about British industry? The Conservative party wants — the Government are said to want the same—to restore faith in Britain and what we do. How do we restore faith in our industry by selling out to the Americans?

I said that public opinion, business and finance were stunned by the announcement. They do not know what to expect next. What else will the Government negotiate to sell? Will we get rid of Rolls-Royce to Pratt and Whitney because we still have to support Rolls-Royce? Some Conservative Members say that we are anti-American, but does anybody imagine that the Americans would ever allow their motor, aero engine or aircraft industries to be sold to foreigners? Not for one moment would they consider it. I know that full well from my discussions with President Nixon and his advisers over Rolls-Royce and Lockheed and how we managed to save those.

Let us get away from this so called anti-Americanism. What is happening and is visible in public opinion is that because of Westland, and now because of this, the public are becoming anti-American. They do not want to see our country and our industries handed over more and more to the American firms.

We have heard about international investment. It has come to Britain with Nissan in the north-east. That company has started a new plant, provided the money for it, created new jobs and is providing cars that it will export for us. By the way, when we are discussing components it must be remembered that Ford has a deficit on its payments. It imports more than it sells abroad and that does not help our trade position. Nissan is a constructive investment providing plant, jobs and exports. It is completely different when a firm comes in, buys what we have and does not pay the Government for the £2·5 billion that they have put into the firm.

We export capital abroad—to my great regret, far too much capital. Firms know that with interest rates as they are, with sterling as it was in 1981—which destroyed our markets—and with sterling fluctuating as it is at present, they cannot be successful here. That is why they invest abroad. Does the result of their investment abroad return? No, it stays abroad for further investment. Every penny of profit that Ford makes here goes back to the United States. When American Ford took over the whole of the shareholding—it was formerly held by individuals in Britain who were bought out — part of the arrangement was that all the profits should go back to the United States. The same will happen with General Motors. That is detrimental to British interests.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Ford has just invested £100 million in its Transit plant at Swaythling in Southampton?

Mr. Heath: The profits will all go back to the United States, and that will happen with General Motors. My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) mentioned General Motors plants. We are not denigrating General Motors plants in Britain — [HON. MEMBERS: "The Opposition are."] I am not responsible for that. What remains of our motor industry, which is vital and which has a defence interest, should remain in British hands and not be completely taken over by the United States.

General Motors wants to buy British Leyland, either because it can make a go of it or to wind it up. Those are

the options. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State does not want it to be wound up. Why is it that only General Motors can make a go of it? Why do we not tackle the problem of management and education? Instead of cutting back on our universities and technical colleges, why do we not deal with the problem through the education of management? Obviously it will take time for a firm like BL, which was in the doldrums during the 1970s, to recover completely, advance its technology and regain its markets. It has done remarkably well. It has regained the percentage of the market that it had in 1973, which was a good percentage.

I am told that BL now has truck technology that is in advance of that in America. That is why General Motors wishes to buy it. It will always buy technology that is in advance of its own and keep it for itself. I do not blame General Motors; that is what it has always done. America did the same over atomic power with the McMahon Act. We contributed to the atomic energy knowledge of the world during the second world war. Afterwards America clamped down with the McMahon Act and said, "Nothing more." That is something we will always remember in relation to defence. Some of us may have long memories, but there comes a time when experience is useful.

If British Leyland is sold out to overall American control, our control is lost. I ask my right hon. Friend, who is an honourable man, not to talk about guarantees, because they will not be kept. They have not been kept in the past. Already his predecessor has been complaining about the fact that Vauxhall uses less then 50 per cent. of British components. British Leyland uses up to 92 per cent., so that that type of guarantee is useless. Any guarantee about the number of jobs is useless because, if it wants to close down, it merely goes to the Secretary of State—as I know from personal experience—and says, "If we cannot wind down, we shall pack it in altogether." We would be faced with that alternative as a result of a handover to American firms.

It is clear that we must forge ahead with technology and not hand over what we have to American firms. An undertaking has been given about exports, but that will not be kept. We know that from experience. None of the undertakings will be kept if the position changes. Above all, when the automobile industry goes into a recession in the United States, British plants will be wound up. Alas, that happens in our country. Some of us have fought against it for years. Plants are established in Scotland and Wales; a recession arrives, the midlands keep going and Scotland and Wales are shoved out.

Exactly the same will happen to the British motor industry. It will be wound down to keep Detroit going. General Motors and Ford carry out the greater part of their research in Detroit. I have been a round their laboratories. What will our young people think? There will be only one place for them to go if they have any technological knowledge or if they wish to gain technological experience. That is how we shall lose the best of our young men to the United States. We have already lost far too many and I do not wish to see them lost in that way.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Bathgate, in my constituency, still has the greatest concentration of machine tools under one roof in Europe. Many of us ask what will happen to that great concentration of skill and expertise.

Mr. Heath: I hope that it will be maintained, because I hope that we can persuade the Government to abandon this project.

I recommend an attempt to develop European co-operation. My right hon. Friend has said that no attempt has been made to do so, but that we must consider all the options. He attacks the Opposition for saying that that was an option that they did not want. If he has not examined the European option, his case is not proven. In the European option, we maintain control through the Community. The Opposition may not wish to acknowledge that, but we could continue to maintain control over British firms that are co-operating in Europe with European firms.

It is said that there is overproduction and overcapacity, but is that a reason for selling out to the Americans? It is a reason for Europe to be sensible, to adjust its capacity to world demand and, with efficiency, to gain a larger share of the world market. In present circumstances, the United States becomes more and more protectionist and would not take in our vehicles produced by General Motors and Ford. The alternative option is to work for a European arrangement — not a takeover, but an arrangement — which would be a joint operation. We have been successful in defence. There is no reason why we should not have success in the automobile industry.

I wish to be plain and honest. I cannot support the Government's proposition to sell out the remains of the British motor industry to American firms. I shall resist it in every way possible.

6.9 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) have completely demolished the Government's case for allowing parts of British Leyland to fall into the hands of two giant multinational American companies. A reasonable person listening to the debate would not think that the Government had grounds for proceeding along the path that they are contemplating. They are suggesting that a key company in a core sector of British manufacturing should be handed over to a major competitor in volume car manufacture and a major competitor in buses and trucks. If the volume car business fell into the hands of Ford, and if the proposals for handing over the truck division to General Motors went ahead, 60 per cent. of the British car market would be dominated by American multinational companies.

Why is it important to retain the ownership of British Leyland in the United Kingdom? Cars are central to British manufacturing industry, not only in metal bashing and engineering but, as Japan, the United States and almost every other country have demonstrated, in electronics, in materials such as ceramics and plastics, and in almost every high-skill and high-technology area. Therefore, it is vital that we retain a thriving British presence in the industry.

It is not surprising that, during the past 30 years, the Japanese have done everything possible to have a thriving motor industry. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, it is not surprising that President Eisenhower said what he did about General Motors being good for America, because the motor industry is central to the economy of any country. British Leyland and the British people will have been dismayed by the revelation

[Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth]

that talks are taking place. The company, its employees, the House and the people believed that the Government had a clear strategy for British Leyland's future. It was a strategy of collaboration with Honda that would allow British Leyland to thrive as a medium-size vehicle manufacturer, I hope growing into a larger manufacturer, which could meet the competition from the Pacific basin, the rest of Europe and the United States. It is almost impossible for any vehicle manufacturer to survive without having a foothold in the Pacific basin, and it was clear that the link provided British Leyland with access to the knowhow and technology at Honda and with access to Honda's market. Thereby, it could build a successful business not only in Europe but elsewhere in the world.

The discussions that were revealed this week have called that strategy into question. The Minister has a responsibility to spell out to the House and to British Leyland exactly what will happen to the Honda option if those discussions come to fruition. I hope that he can make that clear. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, the Government have invested billions of pounds of taxpayers' money in British Leyland, and it is only fair and reasonable that taxpayers should have some return on that investment.

British Leyland has just begun to turn the corner. It has not made extra demands upon the public purse in recent years, and this should have been the last occasion for the Government to suggest the sale of parts of the company or its major volume business to its American competitors. Instead, they should have reinforced the success that the employees and management of British Leyland have achieved and helped them to achieve even greater success.

I hope that the Government will reconsider the permission which they gave to the company to proceed with discussions with General Motors and Ford. I hope that the Government will pursue their previous policy, so that if they wish to dispose of parts of the company that are not central to the volume car business, such as Land Rover, management buy-outs can become an option. Such a buy-out allowed Jaguar to develop and succeed, which has benefited not only the midlands but the entire country, and justified the previous investment in that company. When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that he will tell the House that the possibility of employee or management buy-outs of parts of British Leyland will be considered and discussed with the management, and whether offers of assistance will be made to management should they wish to consider buying out.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a distinct difference between the market potential for a prestige executive car such as Jaguar, which has been extremely successful in the United States, and the truck and volume car markets, both of which have over-capacity? Is not drawing a parallel between them, as the hon. Gentleman is attempting to do, very hazardous?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the bus and truck divisions, where there is obvious over-capacity and a major structural difficulty. However, I was referring to Land Rover, where the position is different. It has been one of the most successful parts of British Leyland, and many of us are amazed that Leyland has been unable to make it a greater success. Not long ago, there was a waiting list to buy Land Rovers. I cannot imagine any other commercial vehicle manufacturer not making a success of a vehicle for which there are waiting lists. Indeed, it is sad that the Government did not come forward long before now with proposals to support the management of Land Rover in making a buy-out offer for that potentially successful company, as they did for Jaguar.

I hope that the central reason for the debate will not be lost. Although the truck and bus divisions and Land Rover are important, the overwhelming importance lies in the volume car business. It has implications for components suppliers and it plays a key role in the motor industry. We should not lose sight of that fact.

If the Minister has any doubts about the strategy of the companies that he is considering allowing to buy parts of British Leyland, especially Ford, and whether they have any desire to look after British interests rather than the interests of multinational corporations, he should examine the statistics for the United Kingdom content of cars sold in Britain between 1973 and 1984. The United Kingdom content of Ford cars sold in this country fell between 1973 and 1984 from 88 per cent. to 46 per cent. For Talbot it fell from 97 per cent. to 42 per cent. and for Vauxhall-General Motors it fell from 89 per cent. to 22 per cent.

That is one of the reasons why we have lost tens of thousands of jobs in the motor car industry. If the Minister examines the track records of those companies, he will see why there is so much anxiety about the possibility of British Leyland falling into foreign hands. If the decision-making process and the design authority are taken away from this country, the technology and jobs will disappear and this country will become a branch factory outpost of the multinational corporations.

As the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) said, those hon. Members who have in their constituencies branch factories of corporations which take decisions and have headquarters elsewhere know how damaging that can be once the recession comes. I hope that the Minister will listen to the clear voices he has heard in the debate and the clear view of the country, which will tell him to think again about the strategy he is contemplating for British Leyland and ensure that the company remains in British hands.

6.21 pm

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): I hope that the House will forgive me if my delivery lacks polish and point. I have not been able to speak in the House for 16 months because of my position. I should make it clear that I am speaking this afternoon as a constituency Member, representing the constituency with the largest number of car workers and component workers in the country, and not as the vice-chairman of the Conservative party organisation.

After listening to the Opposition today and reading their motion, I am reminded immediately of how selective their memory is. Have the Opposition forgotten that Leyland, the successful and famous lorry company, was compelled to make a forced marriage with various car-making companies by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)? The wheel has now turned full circle and we see Leyland Vehicles in dire trouble and the car companies unable to generate the cash to sustain their investment and distribution. It is a sad and serious day for the motor industry that that has come to pass, but the roots of the matter lie with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield.

Have the Opposition, in their xenophobia and pseudo-anger this afternoon, further forgotten that the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) was tripping over himself in his desire to hand out taxpayers' money to get the Ford engine plant established in Bridgend? No account was taken at the time of the effect that that would have on Austin Rover or the midlands.

What about the dispersal policies of the Labour Government and their desire to take the motor industry away from the midlands and its concentration and put it in Scotland and Liverpool? All those places have subsequently collapsed at great cost to the taxpayer. The Opposition now have the effrontery to say that the Government are doing down the motor industry. What a nerve. My goodness me, the Opposition should be accountable to the House and to their constituents for their actions.

In case my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) gets the wrong impression, I must stress that I am not lacking in optimism or fight. I have a record of fighting for the motor industry which is as long as that of any Member. I am proud of that and I intend to continue my efforts.

This afternoon we are trying to assess how we should consider the matter now that the damaging leak has become public property before decisions have been made. The more the Opposition try to raise the temperature and paint a picture of woe, the greater is the commercial damage and the certainty that more jobs will be lost. The Opposition are pleased because they see that as a weapon in their efforts to bring down the Government. That is the only reason why the Opposition are raising the matter.

There is genuine uncertainty and anger in the west midlands. I acknowledge what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) said and I accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) gave effective voice to that uncertainty and anger.

We have suffered in the west midlands and we find it difficult to understand how money is found for British Steel, which puts private firms in the west midlands out of business—an issue on which I resigned earlier from the Administration—and why the fuel and energy costs of the National Coal Board and other nationalised industries are subsidised at the expense of competing firms in the west midlands. When there are difficulties in the west midlands there is apparently some obstacle to helping us. I recognise that that is a genuine fear which has been effectively voiced.

The Opposition seem to have forgotten the debate about Bathgate and the right hon. Member for Small Heath gave us the Opposition's only prescription for dealing with the bus industry. The Opposition believe that we should subsidise routes on which people do not want to travel and that fares should be subsidised to attract people on to those routes. Many people do not want to use these buses which are, in any case, unsuitable vehicles for many roads. The Opposition then believe that we should subsidise the bus manufacturers. It is a vicious circle and there is no future along that road. The Opposition deliberately set their face against the future and look back selectively to the past.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Miller: I am sorry, I shall not give way as I am in a hurry to allow other hon. Members to take part in the debate.

An examination of the truck industry will reveal that the Leyland vehicle, the Road Train, is an award-winning design. I had the pleasure, with the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne), of welcoming that vehicle outside the House of Commons as a demonstration of Leyland Vehicles' achievements. Leyland is in a strong position with regard to manufacture and technology but its marketing and distribution side is not so healthy. A powerful company could give assistance to Leyland but no Government or taxpayer could supply it. British Leyland's efforts deserve such assistance.

I am not concerned for the position of Leyland Vehicles as much as I am concerned for the position of Bedford Vehicles as a result of any proposed merger. I am confident that Leyland Vehicles has the strength to compete and it has demonstrated that. I do not take such a pessimistic view of our domestic technology, design and construction. Rather I believe that it is the question of distribution and marketing, especially overseas, that is essential. No amount of taxpayers' money or Government purchasing will help in that respect. Only overseas marketing will assist because the British market is so limited.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup fought in the desert with my father-in-law in the Honourable Artillery Company. To my knowledge they went to the front in Bedford trucks.

Mr. Heath: I should like to correct what my hon. Friend said. I never fought in the desert, let alone in a Bedford truck.

Mr. Miller: I was perhaps giving my right hon. Friend more credit that he should have had. He did, however, certainly serve in the HAC with my father-in-law who was definitely in the desert.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) raised the difficulty about the inclusion of Land Rover in the deal. I should have liked Land Rover to have the chance to operate by itself, although the success of that company has been greatly over-stated in the House. One need only look around the farmers and growers of Worcestershire to see what vehicles they are driving. They are not using Land Rovers; they are driving Land Rover derivatives, lighter four-wheel drive vehicles with a greater degree of comfort for their wives who can use the cars to take the children to school, go to the post office and do other things that wives do.

The failure to develop the Land Rover range has put the company into its predicament. It needs substantial financial resources. The difficulty with the management buy-out solution is that, unless there is substantial financial backing, it will not be able to produce the necessary derivatives. I join those hon. Members who seek assurances that Land Rover production will remain and will be developed in this country. That is my reservation about the General Motors proposals.

The Austin Rover proposals are in a different category. I say that not because I live in the west midlands but because the talks are by no means so far advanced. The Opposition say that they have been taken by surprise by the GM proposals which have been touted in the press for months. They have not done their homework, because if they were to read BL's corporate plan they would see clearly set out that its future was seen as an assembler and as a manufacturer of some specialised items only.

[Mr. Miller]

It was inevitable that once the Ford-Fiat talks broke down the Ford Motor Company would seek another avenue to reduce the amount of over-competition in the European market. It amounts to about 2 million vehicles out of a 3 million worldwide overhang. That is serious.

One need only talk to one's local dealer about the amount of profit he can make on a car sale now to know that dealers wish for a return to a much more orderly market with some prospect of a profit. Their reactions will be governed by that more than by any other consideration. They will influence their customers.

We must have an early resolution of the problem because of the commercial damage being done. When Austin Rover is trying to set up a new agent distribution network in America to handle the new Rover models; when it is trying to set up Austin Rover Japan to promote not just its production but the Peugeot 205 and Jaguar sales; when it is about to conclude an agreement with Honda for the production of additional models in the west midlands; and when the new Rover replacement upon which the company's marketing and export strategy depends is about to be launched, a huge uncertainty is cast on the scene. There will be doubts amongst suppliers, dealers, customers and, more importantly, the work force which, over the past 12 months, has given such a convincing demonstration of what can be achieved. We owe it to them to end this damaging uncertainty which could be commercially crippling if it is allowed to continue beyond the end of this week.

I am more than happy to support the Government tonight, because it is significant that their amendment does not mention Austin Rover. I believe that the plan is forward-looking. People who object to the talks conveniently overlook the well-known fact that Austin Rover has been engaged in talks with Volkswagen, Renault, perhaps Fiat, and BMW. It is no surprise that the talks have been going on. I hope that the Ford initiative is found to be unacceptable, although as a west midlands Member I am confident that the manufacturing costs in Longbridge are far lower than those in any Ford plant in Europe. If any sale were to be fairly conducted, production would be assured at Longbridge, but my fear is that with Ford coming in Honda would pull out. The utilisation at Longbridge would drop and the costs would rise. The company would be unfairly threatened on that basis.

Honda's reaction to the announcement is vital. What assurances have the Government been able to obtain about its continued co-operation? What is the Japanese industry's attitude to continuing the voluntary industry agreement if there is to be no native British industry to protect? That is an important question. What is Nissan's attitude? It was brought into this country on one assumption and it is now faced with a completely different market. There are serious questions that will need quick answers, but I am happy to support the Government in their amendment.

6.34 pm

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): It is obvious that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) was trying to earn his corner as the vice-chairman of the Conservative party organisation. Even he could give only qualified approval to the proposals, because the implication of what he said was that if the Government's amendment had included the words "Austin Rover", he would not have been able to join the Government in the Lobby tonight.

The discussions about the future ownership of parts of BL have profound implications for the whole of the United Kingdom, but once again the information, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) said, has had to be dragged out of the Government by a private notice question and by the Opposition providing time for the debate today.

We are debating an industry which is the backbone of the economy and is the country's largest employer, but which will be put sadly out of joint if the current discussions to sell part of BL are allowed to continue. Despite the assurances on which the Secretary of State said he would insist, let there be no mistake about the outcome. If General Motors is allowed to buy BL's commercial vehicle division, and if the Ford Motor Company acquires Austin Rover, there will be a clear conflict between the worldwide strategy of those multinationals and the United Kingdom's national interest. In the process, thousands of jobs will be lost, and the capacity to design and build vehicles, with the skill that goes with that, will also go.

The Secretary of State believes that those acquisitions will provide a more secure future for BL's employees. Over-capacity has been mentioned. Does the right hon. Gentleman imagine that BL's market share would be added to that of General Motors, or Fords, and that everything would go on as before? Is it not likely that, following those acquisitions, there would be rationalisation—the polite name for sackings—because of the overlap and similarity of the model ranges? Has the right hon. Gentleman never heard of tied imports and the lack of exports from the United Kingdom by the multinationals? Is he aware that their design capacity is located outside the United Kingdom and that the only remaining such capacity is in BL? Is he aware that the key decisions affecting the multinationals' operations are taken well outside the United Kingdom? If the Government want Great Britain to become just another star on the United States flag, why do they not say so?

From the Government's recent and current action, it is clear that they have no confidence in British management or in the work force, so why should the people of Britain have confidence in the Government? The Government have not lifted a finger to do anything about the miserable Austin Rover-Spanish export quota or the differential tariffs, a subject which I have mentioned many times on the Floor of the House.

The apparent justification for the dicussions, put forward by the Prime Minister, is that BL cannot be allowed to be a continuing drain on the taxpayer. The right hon. Lady should have distinguished between the different parts of BL before she made that statement.

It has been said that Austin Rover has had no taxpayer's money for more than two years. It was £250 million in the red in 1980, but it is breaking even now. It should not have escaped the attention of the House that all the European volume producers are incurring losses. Land Rover, incidentally is in profit.

Productivity at Austin Rover is as good as, if not better than, that of its competitors. In a recent survey by *The Engineer* magazine, the Metro line was classed as the most efficient in Europe. Production levels at Austin Rover, with the introduction of new technology, will be up to Japanese levels in two years, if it is allowed to carry on.

As I speak of the Japanese, it reminds me of the so-called gentleman's agreement between the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and its counterpart in Japan. This agreement limits the imports of Japanese vehicles to 11 per cent. per year. If there is no home-based industry, there is no need for the agreement, which is entitled JAMA, and therefore there will be no restrictions on Japanese imports. It follows that there will be a squeeze on Ford, GM, and Peugeot.

The acquisition of Leyland Trucks makes sense to GM. It allows GM to buy a market share in Europe and it will give it better facilities and better engines. The repercussions in jobs, however, could be felt at Luton or Dunstable. It will not solve the problem of over-capacity for either GM or Ford, but it will provide an opportunity for them to restructure their European operations. Any assurances given to the Secretary of State will be pushed to one side in the face of the intense rivalry between these two companies. With the acquisition of Land Rover, GM will acquire a type of vehicle that it does not make, but the defence implications of such acquisition have not been properly answered.

In this past month, of the 41,000 vehicles sold by Ford, only 27,000 were made in the United Kingdom, and of the 29,000 sold by GM, fewer than 15,000 were made in the United Kingdom. If the Minister thinks that this trend will not accelerate if discussions come to fruition, he knows little about the motor industry.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): My hon. Friend is discussing the reasons for GM's wish to take over part of BL. I am the ex-employee of Self Changing Gears, which is in the constituency of our hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) and which is part of the BL empire, does he agree with me that GM may wish to take over the firm in an effort to eliminate competitors for certain contracts for gearboxes and thus ensure that it has all those contracts? The employment consequences in Coventry of such an acquisition would be tremendous.

Mr. Park: I agree that the situation outlined by my hon. Friend is most probable.

A considerable proportion of the content of the vehicles sold by Ford and GM is sourced from Europe and Japan, as distinct from BL, which obtains 92 per cent. of its components from Britain. The effect of a takeover by or a merger with Ford or GM would be disastrous for the components industry in the United Kingdom. Ford and GM would source their low technology parts from the United Kingdom, but high technology parts would be shipped in from elsewhere. Local content would be increased, but the impact on skill and technology would be immense.

The Minister has suggested that such a takeover would lead to greater security of employment. My personal experience of the takeover by Chrysler of Rootes was that it did not provide greater security. When Peugeot took over from Chrysler, it did not want the production capacity, but it did want access to the dealer network. Does the Minister imagine that the dealer network will remain intact after acquisition by Ford or GM? How many jobs and how many businesses would go in that rationalisation?

Despite the Government's avowed support for small businesses, for the vehicle industry the Government seem to believe that big is beautiful. By their tremendous efforts, the management and work force at Austin Rover have shown a medium-sized car producer can survive and prosper, given flexibility among the work force and proper equipment. Austin Rover is at the forefront in the use of new technology, and Ford would love to gain access to its design and production technology.

Austin Rover has recognised that it is not in a position to do everything, so it has collaborated with Honda, initially with the Acclaim, and currently with the 2·5 litre engine for the Rover 800, with which it hopes to break back into the United States this summer. Austin Rover has developed and built the 1·3 engine for the Rover 213 at Longbridge, and it uses the Honda five-speed gearbox in the Montego and Maestro. It is Austin Rover's intention to build this gearbox at Longbridge, with the addition of 400 jobs. Since Honda would not wish to collaborate with Ford, the Montego and Maestro would be stranded, with no five-speed gearbox, and plans to get back into the United States this summer with the Rover 800 would be aborted.

Collaboration is one thing; takeover by a foreign company is another matter. The bidders have made it clear that it is their intention to reduce capacity in the bus division because the bus market has collapsed as a result of Government policy on public transport, which has stopped orders from local authorities. Throughout the motor industry, employment has fallen by 176,000 since 1979. Employment in the west midlands, in particular, has been decimated. The Government are apparently so calloused against their record-breaking unemployment figures that they are prepared to contemplate and even encourage discussions which will undoubtedly lead to more job losses.

It would be interesting to know who made the first move—did the multinationals approach BL, or did the Government approach the multinationals—but shall we ever be told? Taxpayers' money has rightly gone into BL, but it needed the wise use of that money to acquire and develop the latest technology, tremendous efforts by management and a willing work force, good industrial relations and a belief in its products to bring BL to a point of viability. Is it now to see those joint efforts auctioned off in the market place, creating disillusionment and further unemployment, all for the sake of political dogma?

6.48 pm

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): This is an auspicious day on which to speak. It is a watershed not just for British Leyland but for myself as it happens to be my 40th birthday.

Will this debate solve anything? Will it answer any of the questions that have been posed? Will it merely build upon the synthetic indignation of the Opposition who see their role as embarrassing the Government, however much they may worry ordinary people in the process?

Is it because that chameleon the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) — a chameleon changes its colour to match its environment —came blustering around Chorley a week or so ago and was forced yet again to make commitments that he could not keep?

Do the Opposition have any understanding of the concern of my constituents at the manner in which they raised questions in the House on Monday about my constituency without doing me the courtesy of informing

[Mr. Robert Atkins]

me in advance? They asked questions concerning an issue which is not a secret in Leyland and Farington, which has been in the offing for some months and which management have openly admitted to trade union leaders was in process. The Opposition ought to be ashamed of themselves.

Here we are, however, and there are several points that I should like to make to the House and to my Front Bench about Leyland Vehicles, whose truck and bus division, which employs some 6,000 people, is centred in my constituency. Since 1983, during which time I have represented South Ribble, I have had the good fortune to be in regular contact with management and unions on the future of the truck and bus division. Indeed, I have led three delegations to Ministers to discuss problems, and will do so again this Friday. The trade unionists have taken great trouble to think about, to research into, and to discuss the difficulties, the options and the solutions as they see them. They have impressed me, and I know that they have impressed the Ministers that they have met, with their commitment and sense of responsibility.

I therefore urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench not to ignore or to talk at the trade unions. They should have a proper and detailed discussion with them and use their ideas. If I can do anything to help, I shall be more than pleased to do so and to facilitate meetings.

Secondly, is it any wonder that politicians get such a bad reputation when we open our mouths to make snap judgments before we know the facts? General Motors, Ford or Laird could be a good idea. They might not. We do not know. We should wait and see. Some people in Leyland Bus believe that, in the event of privatisation, Leyland Bus, being bigger than Laird, would be interested in taking that company over rather than the reverse. Is this just a simple expedient to rid the Government of the problems of Leyland Bus when there is such a decline in the United Kingdom market? Leyland Bus is the largest exporter of public service vehicles and has 90 years' experience. It has made a great contribution to the world's commercial vehicles. There is also the possibility of another offer. Has there been any consultation with Leyland Bus about its view of restructuring for the United Kingdom bus manufacturing market?

Thirdly, British Aerospace, which is the other large employer in my constituency, has been increasingly involved in collaboration and co-operation with the United States and Europe—and successfully. Why is there no possibility of doing the same with another vehicle manufacturer?

Fourthly, we must ensure continuity of design, research, testing and production and, of course, of jobs, where possible, subject to the need to sell vehicles world-wide at the right price and on time. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his former incarnation as Minister of State for Trade and Industry for his help with the potential bus deal for Thailand, for which we still have high hopes. Bearing in mind Leyland's historic connections with Third world markets, will my right hon. Friend give his personal attention to better export finance support, soft loans and the rest?

Fifthly, can we be assured about the defence implications of any takeover in regard to vehicles for our armed forces?

Sixthly, bearing in mind the taxpayers' subvention to BL and our oft-stated commitment to wider share ownership, especially among employees, what steps are being taken to ensure that shares will be offered to the British public and to Leyland workers and that taxpayers' money will not be lost to a foreign company?

Seventhly, we must, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) said, end the uncertainty as soon as possible. It has been exacerbated by the antics of Opposition Members. My constituents and the potential purchasers of vehicles now do not know what to believe, and rumour and worries are beginning to mount.

The work force at Leyland Truck and Bus and my constituents are sick and tired of being the butt of second rate comedians and the subject of corny music hall jokes. They are decent hard-working professionals who have experienced a very hard time recently—a decline in world markets, lack of finance and Third world price cutting. Uncertainties caused by the Transport Act 1985 have not helped, although I believe that it will be beneficial in the long run.

Leyland Vehicles has an excellent product range, is building to high standards, and has increased and improved productivity, its design capability, its marketing strategy and product support. It has raised its share of the truck market from 15·1 per cent. last year to 16·5 per cent. this year. In the assembly plant and the test centre, it has facilities second to none. That is why General Motors wants it: it is a success story, arguably better than Bedford.

We should examine the facts and not make snap judgments or exaggerate the effects. Above all, I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that those who have the deepest interest in these matters and who have given of their abilities over the years—those who work for Leyland Vehicles—have a future to look forward to, free from the uncertainty of the past few years, making trucks and buses that sell well and of which they can be justly proud.

6.55 pm

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): When, recently, several Conservative Members surged into the Chamber to listen to their ex-Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), I thought that they had come in to support him and to speak against the Atlanticism that is increasingly being identified with the Government. To judge from the warmth of their approval when he said that, if there is a problem in British Leyland, the remedy lies in collaborative agreements with Europe and not with the United States, I thought that the majority of the House supported this proposition.

The essential difference between General Motors and Ford and the European companies is that the former are European in terms of engineering but American in management. It is important to bear that in mind when considering the future of the British motor industry. It suits our industry to seek collaborative agreements with Europe rather than to have European engineering produced by American companies.

The Government have suggested that they favour a takeover of BL, not collaborative agreements. Surprisingly enough, they do not favour raising private capital as widely as possible either. The Bell Telephone solution for British Telecom would have been the logical conclusion of the Government's philosophy towards

manufacturing industry. The Government talk about takeovers for manufacturing industry, but raising public capital for services.

Conservatives accuse Labour Members of indulging in protectionism. Socialists throughout the world understand that the only muscle available to them when bargaining with multinational companies is that afforded by import controls. The Labour party is about protectionism and import controls, because they provide negotiating muscle.

The trade unions are aware of the problems implicit in what Ford wants to do. It wants to take Austin Rover into volume production and out of competition with itself.

The trade unions are as keen as anyone to seek collaborative agreements that secure the future of industries and their members' jobs. I know of no trade union that is opposed to the four-wheel drive sector of Austin Rover contracting with Fiat for its engines to be fitted in Land Rover and other four-wheel drive vehicles.

It has been stated that the executive directors of Austin Rover are supposedly in agreement about the discussions. A week last Thursday I and some of my colleagues took part in a seminar with those executive directors about the future of the company. They made four announcements confirming that they would be in control of future production methods and were not dependent on agreements or takeovers. If the executive directors invited hon. Members to join in that seminar, and then, through duplicity or otherwise, misinformed them, I can only say that hon. Members will know how to answer any future invitations.

I must end my speech because of the constraints on time. The trade unions have a great deal more to say about this matter, especially about the effect on jobs. I hope that there will be an opportunity in the near future to make some of those points.

7.2 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for what he said about employees and employment in the truck industry in Bedfordshire. I want to deal, first, with the part of the amendment that refers to "satisfactory terms and conditions". Of supreme concern to my constituents are the details of any merger between General Motors and Leyland Trucks — something that will require careful scrutiny.

The merger talks have been taking place for many months, and I hope that they will soon be concluded. The endless uncertainty and worry about the talks is causing a great deal of concern in my constituency. When people make public statements about merger talks, they should not say anything that they know will merely cause more gloom and worry. As negotiations have not been concluded on the merger talks between General Motors and British Leyland, it is impossible now to guess the final outcome.

I remember that 11 years ago we went through a similar problem in Dunstable when the Chrysler company swayed on the brink of closure, with the possibility of severe job losses. Management, unions and the then Labour Government did their best to ensure that public statements were based on fact, not rumour. That restraint helped management and unions in the factory—which is now owned by Renault — to set the business back on a reasonable road.

Bedford Commercial Vehicles has been producing trucks in my constituency for more than 50 years. There has already been mention of what has been supplied for defence. The firm employs 2,400 people at its Dunstable plant, and more than half of what they have produced has been exported. Although the company is foreign-owned, local people believe that Bedford trucks and Vauxhall cars are as British as anything else that has had such long continuity of production in my constituency. Despite the serious slump in world truck business since 1980, the quality of Bedford trucks has been good, industrial relations have been good and there has been an increasing determination by management and unions to work together for the good of the company. That has not only helped the local community, but underpinned many local jobs.

The British content in Bedford trucks is vastly higher than it is in Vauxhall cars. Some statements this afternoon have not been based on fact. We should not compare the two because the use of British components is entirely different, depending on the product.

When the Government have the detailed proposals of the merger in front of them, I hope that they will bear in mind two points. First, the Government amendment refers to the need to

"provide the best prospects for secure long-term employment in the industry."

That includes Bedfordshire. I say to those who are worried about the outcome of the discussions that it is General Motors' marketing and worldwide sales ability that can be —and I choose my words carefully—of great benefit to Leyland Trucks.

Secondly, I make the plea that if the nature of the work changes in the commercial vehicle plants, it is vital that the best retraining is undertaken and that the most modern equipment is introduced for changes in the work carried out.

We have previously had changes of ownership and merger talks in Dunstable. There will be no agreement on a merger unless there is maximum co-operation between management and the unions. The very least that we can do in this House is to lower the temperature. A confrontation and a blazing row, when nothing is yet settled, do absolutely nothing for the good of British industry; it simply causes immense distress and worry to my constituents and to others. We have a duty to those who work in the truck industry to do our best to ensure that there is maximum co-operation on job security.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) *rose*——

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman rising because, sadly, he has not been called?

Mr. Taylor: With 8,000 Land Rover workers in my constituency, I take it very badly that I have not been called.

Mr. Speaker: I am terribly sorry. With the best will in the world, it is not possible to call everyone who wishes to speak. I did warn the House about that.

Mr. Ron Lewis (Carlisle): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does not the fault lie with the Government, who have created a lack of time by putting forward two statements today that everyone knew would lead to lengthy questions?

Mr. Speaker: That is a contributory factor. However, when the Front-Bench spokesman rises, there is really nothing that I can do other than to call him.

7.7 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): I shall not stoop to respond to the charges of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about anti-Americanism on the Opposition Benches. No one who knows my education and employment record would dare to suggest that I am anti-American. Nor will I stoop to deal with the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) denigrated General Motors, Vauxhall and the Ford Motor Company. The best that can be said about the Secretary of State is that he clearly wrote that part of his speech before he listened to my right hon. and learned Friend.

One thing I will tell the Secretary of State is that I learnt, both as a student and as an employee of both British and American manufacturers, that the Americans do not respect doormats. That is what the debate is about—it is whether British industry and the British Government are to be doormats for the American multinationals.

I agree with the Secretary of State on one point—we are debating a central part of British manufacturing industry. It is appalling that we should be debating such an important matter, which affects the livelihood of more than 500,000 people, in less than three hours. I hope that those Conservative Members who are complaining about inadequate time will press for a further debate in Government time.

We have been trying to debate three sectors of the motor manufacturing industry. I shall deal first and briefly — more briefly than I would wish — with the bus industry. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) was as disappointed at not catching your eye, Mr. Speaker, as those Conservative Members who have already protested. We are both concerned about the proposed merger between Metro Cammell Weymann, which is in my constituency, and the Leyland bus division. The bus market is flat. It has been decimated by the Government's policies. Anyone who visits the customers of bus manufacturers will be told that they are not buying buses because of the Government's policies. For the Government to visit the problems of that industry, which they have caused, on the people who work in the industry is a clear indictment of their own policies. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington and I naturally fear that a single merged bus company producing the same number of buses, with overcapacity in the industry, will mean redundancies. They will be in either Birmingham or Workington, and that is why we are concerned about the merger. We need to see the terms and receive clear assurances on that point.

Another point affects both the bus companies and the passengers of bus companies. It has always been a matter of concern to the people who buy buses in Britain that there should be two sources to give them the opportunity to choose between companies. The Government's proposals, and their pressure on the Laird group and the Leyland bus division, will create a single monopoly source for buses.

The second sector of concern is the truck market. As we know, the truck market collapsed two or three years ago, but the Leyland trucks division now has a good model range and excellent production facilities as a result of public investment. The Leyland trucks division is now poised to take advantage of an upturn in the market. That is why General Motors is interested in it. General Motors took the decision two or three years ago that it would concentrate on the heavy truck market. It picked the Leyland trucks division as an acquisition. I am sure that General Motors came knocking on the door because it recognised the value of the Leyland facilities, which have been built with public money, and from which it wishes to get the profits.

Again, the question needs to be asked: what will happen to the jobs of those who work not only in Leyland truck division, but also in the factories in Dunstable and elsewhere in General Motors. What will happen to the jobs in Lancashire, Birmingham, Dunstable and Luton? We need to be told.

The Secretary of State told us on Monday, and repeated today, that he would expect undertakings to be given by General Motors. He said on Monday that General Motors is willing to give undertakings that the majority of products sold by the businesses involved will be manufactured in the United Kingdom. What majority will that be? Will it be the same proportion as are manufactured today, or a smaller or larger proportion? We should be told before we decide whether to approve the takeover.

The Secretary of State told us that products will continue to have a high local content. Is he saying that about General Motors, which has been criticised by his predecessor for having less than 50 per cent. local content?

Mr. John Carlisle: That is on cars.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman may not agree with what the previous Secretary of State said, but he said it at the Dispatch Box only four months ago. He criticised General Motors for having the worst record on local content and local manufacture of any of the three big manufacturers. Will we have the same amount of local content if it takes over Leyland truck division? We need answers.

Mr. Carlisle *rose*——

Mr. Davis: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because he does not know the answers.

The Secretary of State then said that there will be a substantial level of exports, but what exports? The same substantial level that we have at the moment—to the same market? That is another crucial point. The allocation of markets will depend on the decisions taken in Pontiac, Michigan, not in the United Kingdom. A subsidiary company of an American manufacturer is not allowed to sell abroad unless it has been given that right. That is a crucial point, on which we shall want much more specific undertakings than the Secretary of State seems to require.

The Secretary of State told us that he has an undertaking that research and development facilities will be maintained in the United Kingdom. What research and development facilities has General Motors in the United Kingdom at the moment? Our understanding is that it is all done in Germany. For how long would research and development be continued in this country?

The Secretary of State then told us that General Motors would undertake "appropriate" levels of investment. We have heard that before. We might have different views of what is an appropriate level of investment in the truck business in Britain.

The Secretary of State has not given us any undertakings from his lords and masters at General Motors about jobs in the United Kingdom. There was nothing in his list on Monday or today about assurances for employment in the United Kingdom nor about assurances that all the factories will continue to exist in the United Kingdom, such as the truck factories at Preston, Dunstable and elsewhere.

We have been through this before, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) reminded us, with Chrysler. It gave undertakings and assurances, accepted by Conservative as well as Labour Governments. Those assurances were not worth the paper on which they were written. When the crunch came, Chrysler tore up those agreements and ignored them, and the British Government were faced with the alternatives of accepting total closure or capitulating to slightly lesser demands.

We expect a clear statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at the end of these discussions. I accept his assurance today that no decision has been taken, but the Opposition require that there is a proper debate after a full statement by the Government, preferably in a White Paper, so that we can see and test just what undertakings are being given by this multinational company. We expect that debate in Government time.

Another multinational involved in this debate is Ford. It is not setting its sights on the truck business. On the contrary, it is in the process of selling its truck business and is just selling its plant in the United Kingdom. The plant at Langley, which is manufacturing heavy trucks, will be sold to Iveco. The decision by Ford has been to dominate not the truck market but the car market. It has set its sights on increasing its share of the United Kingdom market from 26 per cent. to 44 per cent. It has decided —I do not criticise its interests—that it wants to be not the market leader but the market dominator. It is entitled to take that decision, but we are equally entitled to say that we shall not aid and abet it.

The Secretary of State said that the initiative came from Ford. I am concerned about the words that he used. There were no discussions with Ford until the Fiat talks had collapsed. The talks with Fiat collapsed because the Italians and the Americans could not agree about control, and control is at the centre of the debate. After the talks collapsed in November, I do not believe that Ford came knocking on the door. The Secretary of State said not that that had happened, but that he was approached. From the information that I have been given, the fact is that the door was opened already and the company was beckoned inside by the British Government. The Department of Trade and Industry was asking Ford to look at Austin Rover.

From Ford's point of view, a takeover of Austin Rover does not make sense. A merger between Ford and Fiat might make sense because they have complementary ranges, but Ford and Austin Rover have competitive ranges and competitive products competing in the same markets. It does not make sense for Ford to take over Austin Rover unless it wants to close some production facilities. Ford is buying market share. It will not want extra factories. The president of Ford Europe has told the world that there is over-capacity in motor manufacturing in Europe. The company has four factories in Europe—one each at Cologne, Valencia, Dagenham and Halewood. It is stretching our credulity to the limit to ask us to believe that Ford knocked on the Government's door and said that it wanted to take over two more factories at Longbridge and Cowley. I do not believe it. If Ford takes over Austin Rover, there will be both job losses and closures of factories. It will not maintain all four factories in the United Kingdom. It does not need those four factories in the United Kingdom. Where will the jobs go? Will they go at Dagenham, Halewood, Longbridge in Birmingham or Cowley in Oxford? We should be told.

I am not suggesting that the jobs will be lost before the general election, but after it. We want to know when and where they will be lost before the general election.

Ford also has a little research and development in Dunton in Essex. Research and development and design should not be shrugged off by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, because they are critical for the retention of manufacturing industry. We are not simply making a nationalistic point. Technology, experience and skills are transferred from industry to industry. Just as the motor industry is applying techniques that were learnt in the aerospace industry, so the same techniques will cross the boundaries between industries into our remaining engineering and manufacturing industries. We want those techniques because otherwise we shall be left with unskilled work, which means opportunities only for an unskilled work force.

Already the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders is complaining about reductions in scientific research. What is the point of increasing scientific research, if we do not have research and development to apply the fruits of that research? And proximity to design is essential for a component manufacturer. If we do not retain the design of motor cars, the future is bleak for Lucas, GKN and all the small component manufacturers. We are considering more than 500,000 jobs at Austin Rover, Ford and in component manufacturing.

So far, jobs in the dealer network have not been mentioned. What will happen to Austin Rover dealers, and all the small business men who vote Conservative? If Ford took over Austin Rover, it would have two dealers networks selling competitive ranges. Ford would not keep them both. It began the cuts in dealerships in the 1960s, followed by Chrysler, British Leyland and General Motors. Ford let the importers in by freeing the dealers to import French, German and Italian cars. Will they repeat a previous mistake?

On a similar point, what will happen to the Austin Rover dealers who have been selling Sherpa vans? In too quick a response, the Secretary of State said that Freight Rover would go to General Motors. If it does, from where will Austin Rover dealers get their vans? If the Government tell us that they can get the Sherpa vans from General Motors, who will make them in future, why cannot General Motors get Land Rovers from British Leyland and sell them in that way in the United States?

We do not need a takeover, an acquisition or a merger to expand and extend British motor manufacturing industry. The heart of the matter is: who will take the decisions about who has the markets? Who will decide where production takes place, and whose cars are sold abroad? American control means that the American parent company, the American multinational motor manufacturer, will take decisions about British subsidiaries. What will happen to the sales of Land Rover abroad? Are we being asked to believe that the American Government will not tell General Motors not to sell Land Rover to Libya? Of course they will. But the point is not whether Land

[Mr. Davis]

Rovers should be sold to Libya or South Africa, but where the decisions should be taken; and they should not be made in Michigan.

The Ford and Fiat deal fell through because the Italians would not accept American control. That has been openly admitted. Why then will our Government accept American control?

We are not talking about privatisation, or the links that the Secretary of State mentioned, or collaboration. He twitted my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) by saying that the Labour party advocated collaboration. We do, but this is not collaboration. It is a takeover. This is not a link, but an old-fashioned merger which will give the United States control. That is why we object.

And what about the effect on Honda? Austin Rover has a collaboration agreement with Honda. Who has talked to Honda about that? I understand that that agreement includes a clause which allows Honda to withdraw from collaboration with Austin Rover, if any talks take place about a merger of Austin Rover with any other motor manufacturer. Who checked that Honda would not cancel its collaboration with British Leyland? Will the new Rover XX be the last of that line?

Then we come to the real issue. While the British Government were publishing the British Leyland corporate plan six months ago and talking about collaboration with Honda in public, they were talking to American motor manufacturers in private about takeovers. Once again, the second time since Christmas, we have a clear example of the Government pursuing one policy in public and another in private.

7.25 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Morrison): The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that he thought the debate would be angry. There have been strong feelings and emotions, but no anger. I understand those strong feelings and emotions, because we are discussing the future of part of the British vehicle industry, which employs tens of thousands of people and affects many others.

It is surprising that some hon. Members apparently want to stop the world. Would that we could. It would be easier for the Government, but we cannot. I am not a pessimist—that has been imputed to some members of the Government—about the car industry, provided that we look ahead. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) that any delay will be damaging.

The question that we must address is: can or should BL continue as it is, whether in public or private ownership? I believe that it cannot do so. Even if it could, it should not, because in today's world standing still means dropping backwards. Despite its progress, it is a small company exposed on the world stage. If it continues as it is, there will be a risk that it will slowly but surely expose taxpayers to even greater potential liabilities, with no certainty of success.

Many customers want to buy British, as they have done with Ford for 75 years, Vauxhall for 83 years and Bedford for 55 years. I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who was worried that the profits of General Motors would return to the United States. During the past decade GM has invested more than £1,200 million in the United Kingdom, including trading losses of £370 million. That is the record of a company which is committed to the United Kingdom. Ford has invested more than £1,000 million during the past five years, which is more than £100 million more than the profits generated. Of the profits generated, it has paid £450 million in tax to the United Kingdom. In both cases—five years and 10 years—their record is good.

GM and Ford employ about 80,000 people — a significant number. The Opposition's remarks were amazing. Whether we like it or not, difficult decisions must now be made. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), who has not been called to speak, feels strongly about these matters. If we miss our chance, we could be throwing away a golden opportunity to build on the foundations that have been laid. If we do not build on those foundations, we may never build.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morrison: I shall not give way.

I cannot see what is wrong with a potential foreign partnership and ownership. We make investments in the United States, and I should have thought that we would welcome United States' investments in the United Kingdom, because they secure jobs, bring jobs and create exports.

There are three separate issues. My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) referred to Leyland Buses and to Leyland Trucks. I agree with his comments about the unions. I have seen the unions, and I know that they take a constructive view. My hon. Friend will be aware that the BL board supported the current discussions with the Laird group.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Morrison: Last year, Leyland Trucks suffered substantial losses, although the losses were less than in 1984. It has negative cash flows, and market conditions remain difficult. Freight Rover and Land Rover are perceived as being highly profitable, but they are not as profitable as some would have us believe. Leyland Trucks has been going through difficult times. If the divisions are to grow and realise their substantial potential, they must generate sufficient profits to sustain the heavy investment required nowadays to launch new models and remain abreast of the competition.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Morrison: I am coming to my hon. Friend's point.

If General Motors' offer goes ahead, the British companies will have the benefits of financial strength, enormous experience of resources and technical back-up as new products are developed. As some of my colleagues have pointed out, the British companies will have worldwide marketing outlets and a large market in the United States, which has not, to date, been available to them. The potential of the new jobs that could be created at Solihull, if Land Rover and Range Rover can be sold in volume in the United States, is significant. I apologise

to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) for not giving way. I knew that I was getting to the point which I think he wanted me to raise.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) pointed out, we are prepared to look at any option with respect to Austin Rover. We are not prepared to hawk Austin Rover around the market place. We have a proposal and options which the Labour party say we should not even explore. I should have thought that, with ARG having a market share in Europe of only 3·9 per cent., and with Ford being a company with one of the most comprehensive sales and distribution networks in Europe, that must be the route to consider.

The Opposition argue that we should say to Ford, "Go away. We are not interested in finding out the facts or ascertaining whether there will be an industrial and commercial benefit." That simply does not add up. The Labour party will go on regardless, paying taxpayers' money into the company. We now know that the Labour party is totally anti-American. At this stage, we should negotiate as best we can.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 195, Noes 324.

Division No. 61] **[7.35 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Ron Davies.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*

Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, Rt Hon J. E.
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lch N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Carol Mather and
Mr. Robert Boscawen.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on Amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 211.

Division No. 62] **[7.48 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bi[illegible]-Davison, Sir John

Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Carol Mather and
Mr. Robert Boscawen.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*

Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay, and
Mr. Ron Davies

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes with approval the Government's continuing determination to work towards a viable and internationally competitive automotive industry located in the United Kingdom; and endorses the view that, subject to satisfactory terms and conditions, the merger of the commercial vehicle activities of Land Rover, Leyland and Bedford would contribute to that objective and provide the best prospects for secure long-term employment in the industry.

Women (Cancer Screening)

8 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the lamentable failure of the Government to make sure that every woman at risk of cervical cancer is covered by a computerised call and recall screening system with adequate laboratory back-up, as recommended in 1981 by the Committee on Gynaecological Cytology, because this failure has led to thousands of deaths which would have been avoided had successive Ministers shown a real commitment and provided the necessary resources in good time; and calls upon the Government to commit itself now to implement fully and swiftly any recommendations on breast cancer screening it receives from the expert working group established in July last year.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Since this debate is starting very late, may I again appeal for short speeches, from both the Front Benches and the Back Benches?

Mr. Dobson: The Government's failure has led to the deaths of thousands of women which could have been avoided if successive Tory Health Ministers had shown a real commitment and provided the necessary resources in good time. Much of our general criticism of the Government's health record springs from the fact that we have different health policies. The Opposition are committed to the National Health Service. The Government are committed to promoting commercial medicine. But in the case of cervical cancer there is no political difference. Everybody is agreed that we need a comprehensive screening system in this country that covers all women at risk. We have not got such a system, and it is the Government's fault that we have not got it. They stand condemned on every ground. They have been shifty, complacent and negligent. They have failed to heed their expert advisers.

In 1981 the committee on gynaecological cytology recommended the abandonment of the outdated national recall scheme and the establishment of computerised systems in every part of the country, not just to recall those women who had previously had smear tests but to call for the first time those who had never had a smear. This recommendation got off to a bad start because when the committee's proposals were reported to the House on 20 November 1981 by the then junior Health Minister, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg); he did not even mention the introduction of a call system, even to reject it.

The Department of Health and Social Security consultative documents and circulars then went to absolutely ludicrous lengths to avoid mentioning the crucial recommendation about the initial call. In the event, the Government advised health authorities to set up local recall schemes. However, the Government took so little interest in the subject after 1981 that they do not have the faintest idea of how many authorities have introduced even the limited recall schemes that they recommended.

In May 1984 the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) asserted that the outdated national scheme was replaced

"last year with local recall schemes."

This was not true. A survey carried out on my behalf and published less than a year ago showed that of the 201 health authorities in England and Wales, only seven had call and recall schemes, while 77 had no scheme at all. The rest were somewhere in between. The Government never disputed that survey. They could not do so because it was accurate. And in any case they could not challenge the figures because they had none of their own.

On 18 March 1985 the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that it was not true that the Government had not got the information. He said that they had got it through direct contact with health authorities and that the Government were preparing a systematic questionnaire which would soon be issued so that they could compare the standards achieved by every health authority. By 19 December 1985, this was revealed by the new Minister to be not so systematic, after all. It was not designed, he said, for summary and publication. The only alternative explanations are that it was so sloppily drafted as to be useless or that the results were so embarrassing that he dared not disclose them.

On Monday of this week the Minister finally admitted that according to the last check by the DHSS only 13 health authorities were operating computerised call and recall schemes and that he did not intend to make a further check on progress until June of this year.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): I accept entirely my hon. Friend's proposition, but will he take it from me that the Government do not need to wait until there is a countrywide system in place? There are group practices —for example, the group practice in my constituency of which I am a patient — which have computerised services for exactly this purpose. That ought to be encouraged.

Mr. Dobson: But the Government, as my hon. and medically learned Friend knows, are not giving any such encouragement. It is not just that the Government have not set up call and recall schemes. After the smears have been taken they need to be processed in the pathology laboratories to establish whether there are signs of pre-cancer. There are massive delays in the laboratories of all three countries.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): That is not true.

Mr. Dobson: On 29 April 1985 the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that the Government intended to improve the effectiveness of laboratory facilities for processing smears and that he would be discussing with the professions and the health authorities how best to achieve that aim. He made that promise on behalf of the right hon. and hon. Members who are now sitting on the Treasury Bench, so it would be a good idea if they listened to this.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: May I assure the hon. Gentleman that in our pathology laboratories the smears are processed within four days. People are notified about whether they are negative or positive within four days.

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We cannot have intervention upon intervention. Perhaps the hon. Member will allow the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to reply to one intervention at a time.

Mr. Dobson: All I can say to the hon. Lady, who represents a constituency in Lancashire——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: It is the county town.

Mr. Dobson: I thought Preston was the county town of Lancashire.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: That is another error that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Mr. Dobson: Then all I can say is that the hon. Lady and the women in her constituency are unusually fortunate.

Mr. Coleman: Does my hon. Friend recollect that earlier today he appeared on a television news programme during which we were shown a pathology laboratory in this country that contained stacks and stacks of unexamined slides? Were we not told in that programme by the pathologist that this was the experience in all parts of the country?

Mr. Dobson: I cannot confirm what was shown on that programme, because my only contribution to it was my interview. I did not see the rest of the programme. However, if the programme was accurate, it would have been able to show film that indicated that there are enormous delays all over the country.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I spoke today to Dr. Yule of the cytology department at the Christie hospital. He told me that there is a seven weeks' delay, that 35,000 women are waiting for smear results, that this is causing grave anxiety and that over 100 of the tests could be positive. I was also told that the hospital's funding is the same now as it was in 1976.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend has stolen a bit of my thunder. I shall deal later with some of the Manchester details. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said that the Government intended to improve the effectiveness of laboratory facilities and that they would be discussing with the professions and the health authorities how best to achieve it. However, on 18 December 1985 the present Minister for Health told me that specific discussions with health authorities on that issue were not proposed. He had previously told me that he did not know what was the average time taken to process a smear and that he could not list those authorities that had asked clinics or doctors to suspend taking smears because of backlogs in laboratories. He even told me that he did not expect health authorities to express concern to him about delays in processing cervical smears. Clearly he shares the Prime Minister's Orwellian view that ignorance is strength.

What is the position? In the absence of a detailed and comprehensive survey by his officials, I shall give the Minister a few examples. I confirm the information given by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) that at the Christie hospital, which supplies a service for most of the north west, there is a backlog of 35,000 smears, about seven weeks' work; the backlog used to be two weeks. At Sutton Coldfield, which the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services purports to represent, there is a three-month backlog. In Plymouth there is a two-month backlog. In Nottingham the backlog is two to three months. In Kent a person has to wait four months for the result. There is a three-month backlog in Norfolk and Norwich where I understand that slides have had to be stored in an empty garage. When a smear shows signs of pre-cancer a delay of even a few months can be vital. Unnecessary delays are occurring. In many districts doctors have been asked from time to time to reduce the number of smears taken because the laboratories cannot cope.

As in England and Wales, the position in Scotland shows enormous variations. Lothian health board has delays of 10 to 12 weeks. It can no longer do laboratory work that it used to carry out for the Fife health board. Greater Glasgow health board returns its results to doctors within seven days. It almost goes without saying that Tory Ministers constantly chide Greater Glasgow for what they call overspending and inefficiency while praising what they refer to as the efficiency and frugality of the Lothian board. Only fools and accountants see it in that way.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): My hon. Friend is not giving all the facts. Not only is there not a Scottish Minister present, but there is not even one Conservative Member from Scotland here for the debate although the figures for Scotland are probably worse than those for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dobson: In view of the relative lack of Tory Members from Scotland, anyway, if one was present they would probably be over-represented when we see the throng on the Tory Benches.

The Government should have anticipated the problem in the laboratories and should have got to work in 1981 to make sure that enough laboratory staff were being trained to meet the demand. It takes from one to three years to train a laboratory scientist. The Government did not act in time. So all of us are faced with a crisis. The position is now so bad that the Institute of Medical Laboratory Sciences has organised a meeting for this weekend to discuss the subject "Cytology—From Crisis to Crisis".

To meet the crisis, some health authorities have been forced to farm the work out to commercial laboratories. I advise them to take care. Quality control tests on one commercial laboratory showed that it picked up one positive smear in five, while another commercial laboratory actually lost some of the slides that it was supposed to be looking after. If even the best placed authorities can scarcely cope with the current demand for laboratory facilities, what will happen as call and recall schemes come into operation? The chairman of the British Society for Clinical Cytology recently wrote to me to say that that would be the last straw unless adequate staff were appointed and trained.

In the face of all that, the Minister appeared on a "Newsnight" programme on 18 December, offering great sympathy to those who had developed cancer because his predecessors had failed to act. Sympathy is not enough. Action to put things right in future is wanted. The Government should use their powers to oblige health authorities to set up comprehensive schemes covering all women at risk. They should take immediate steps to ensure that enough laboratory staff are recruited and trained. They should provide the necessary extra funding and earmark those funds for the purpose. Nothing less will do.

Much more needs to be done in the long term. The present screening system is often described as preventive. It is not; it is a surveillance system intended to pick up signs of cervical cancer before it does its damage.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that if

administrative staff are cut by as much as 30 per cent. throughout the hospital service there will be no one to operate a recall system of any kind?

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, because Ministers have confessed in answer to questions that administrative staff play an important part in providing direct services for patients. This is one of the services they provide.

In the longer term there should be an effort to do more research into the causes of cancer so that it can be prevented rather than diagnosed at an early stage. More work needs to be done to find out whether there is more than a statistical link between smoking and cervical cancer. More needs to be done to verify or disprove the suggestion that barrier types of contraception seem to reduce the chances of cervical cancer. More effort needs to be put into the development of machines which can read smear slides quicker and more accurately than the laboratory scientist with a binocular microscope.

Dedicated doctors, laboratory scientists, nurses, computing and administrative staff and researchers are eager to take on all those tasks. The only people not showing any commitment are Ministers and officials of the Department of Health and Social Security. The British Medical Association told me yesterday that the DHSS had not consulted the medical profession until a couple of weeks ago, despite the fact that the BMA had been calling for a meeting for almost a year. Ironically, the meeting was arranged for today and had to be cancelled because of the debate. That shows the effort that has been put into the discussions which the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe promised in April.

Almost everybody concerned wants to do things properly. We should ensure that older women who have not had a smear test get them because most older women who die of cervical cancer have never had tests. Clearly effort needs to be concentrated there. That must not mean that younger women get less attention, particularly as there is evidence that some of them are affected by a more virulent, swift-acting cancer.

Considerable doubts are developing about the interval between tests being as long as five years. Many people think that it would be safer to shorten the interval to three years. No one supports the preposterous suggestion made by the Minister on "Newsnight" that a 10-year interval might be all right for younger women.

The Minister might be forgiven for feeling that it is unfair to visit on him the sins of his predecessors, but he cannot shirk responsibility when he is about to ask the House to accept the grotesque complacency of the Government's amendment which invites us to commend

"the Government for its positive action to ensure that by 1988 all health districts will have computerised call and recall systems and adequate laboratory back up".

Even if all the schemes were in operation by 1988—a dodgy suggestion anyway—if the Government were to stick to the five-year interval between smears that would mean that the last woman called for screening would get her computer card in 1993, 12 years after the committee for gynaecological cytology first made its recommendations. Even the skills of Saatchi and Saatchi would be stretched to the limit to turn into a triumph a promise to deliver something 12 years late.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The hon. Gentleman has rightly referred in depth to cervical cancer. Will he be dealing with screening for breast cancer which is so important given the progress that has been made in Sweden? The Committee that is investigating the Swedish experience must produce its report rapidly so that it can be implemented since 12,000 women a year are dying from that form of cancer.

Mr. Dobson: The logical structure of my speech must have prompted the hon. Gentleman to raise the point that I am about to make in my next sentence. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) will concentrate particularly on breast cancer.

That takes us to the Government's welcome, if somewhat belated, decision in July last year to set up an expert working group to advise them on breast cancer screening. Its members and every woman in the United Kingdom will be hoping that when the group comes up with workable recommendations they will be implemented quickly and in full, not half-heartedly, slowly and patchily like the experts' recommendations on cervical cancer. We want the Government to commit themselves tonight to implement quickly and fully whatever the breast cancer experts recommend.

The Government's record on cervical cancer is a disgrace—a lot of words, little action and less money. What the women of this country demand is the same protection that is available to women in many parts of Scandinavia and North America. That would not just save the lives of at least 1,000 women a year; it would save tens of thousands more from worry and concern. Many more lives and worries would be saved by a comprehensive breast cancer screening programme. Neither will cost much money. We all know what needs to be done. What we want now is for the Government to do it.

8.21 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'commends the Government for its positive action to ensure that by 1988 all health districts will have computerised call and recall systems and adequate laboratory back up for cervical cancer screening; and welcomes the establishment of an expert working group to examine urgently the available evidence on breast cancer screening and to propose a range of policy options for implementation within the National Health Service.'.

I regret the absurdly exaggerated and emotive language of the motion moved by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and his speech, but I am glad to have the opportunity to discuss these issues today.

There is no need to underline the vital importance of the matters which will be covered in this debate, so I want to start by reminding the House of the facts as regards both of these forms of cancer. I then want to say something about the position we have reached in improving the effectiveness of cervical screening, and the plans that we have for advancing it further. I shall also deal with the role of screening in the detection of breast cancer, and what the Government have done to get the best scientific advice on the need and how it should be met.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, my world does not begin in 1979. I do remember and have researched much further back. When one looks at the record, only he can explain how he could have had the bare-faced impudence to stand up today and make the criticisms that he did, speaking from the Front Bench for a party with its record in this affair.

[Mr. Barney Hayhoe]

The issue is of great importance. Cervical cancer claims the lives of 2,000 women each year. I am advised that breast cancer claims the lives of 13,000—not 12,000, as referred to by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). Together they represent about 5 per cent. of women's deaths in Britain. In neither case does the knowledge exist to prevent those diseases.

The effectiveness of early detection of cervical cancer by screening is not an issue. Since 1966, when the Labour Goverment introduced a screening programme, that has continued in one form or another. In recent years doubts about its effectiveness have grown. Whereas the previous Labour Government did little, if anything to improve matters, this Government have not only been concerned that the programme has not made the impact on mortality which might have been expected from experience abroad, but have taken action to improve matters. I stress, because of the very party political nature of what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was saying, that the previous Labour Government did nothing.

The national manual recall system operated by the NHS central register at Southport, established well over a decade ago early in the 1970s, has proved ineffective. Very low rates of recall were being achieved. Following advice from the committee on gynaecological cytology and after consultation with health authorities in 1981, the central scheme was wound up and health authorities asked to introduce local recall systems.

The health service circular—HC(81)14—issued in December 1981 made it clear that local recall systems were to be introduced by 1 April 1983. Advice was given to health authorities on the elements of a simple recall system which could be operated manually. It was not essential for health authorities to have a computer in order to introduce an effective system.

In 1984, after looking at the programme again, the Government issued further advice aimed at improving its effectiveness. They were concerned that although the screening programme had been in operation for nearly 20 years, it had had very little demonstrable impact on the number of deaths from cervical cancer. They were also concerned that there had been an observed increase in the number of cases of cervical cancer in women under 35.

The expert committee on gynaecological cytology had been asked to consider all the available evidence on the desirable age and frequency of screening. The CGC concluded that the women most at risk were still those over age 35, with 94 per cent. of deaths occurring in this age group.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does the Minister accept that there has been a dramatic rise in the number of young women who are suffering from carcinoma in situ and it is noticeable that the 60 per cent. rise hides a 117 per cent. rise in that particular age group who are much more at risk? There is now a real epidemic in that age group.

Mr. Hayhoe: I was reporting the advice of the expert committee, the CGC, in 1984. At that time it observed that the majority of women who developed invasive cervical cancer had never been screened. It concluded that population screening had failed to reduce mortality not because the policy was wrong, but because it had not been properly implemented. Those important conclusions were set out clearly for the guidance of the NHS in the Health Service circular, HC(84)17, issued in July 1984.

That circular gave clear guidance on the priorities for screening, and I think it covers the point made by the hon. Lady. Those were women over 35 and those who had been pregnant on three or more occasions. They were to be screened at age 35 and every five years thereafter until age 65. Those under 35 who were or had been sexually active were also to be screened at regular five-yearly intervals.

The circular also gave clear advice to authorities to determine how local resources could be used most effectively. They were invited to consider the use of health education campaigns and the way the service might be provided so as to encourage the women at greatest risk to use it.

Further emphasis was given to the need to have recall systems. Such recall systems were clearly the best way of ensuring that all the women in the priority group who had come forward for screening were recalled at the appropriate time. The response of health authorities to this advice remained a matter of departmental concern. In 1985, therefore, my predecessor as Minister for Health announced yet a further set of initiatives. The catalyst, as the House will recall, for this announcement was the unfortunate and tragic events at Oxford where deaths occurred.

My right hon. and learned Friend, the Minister for Health, issued further advice to health authorities in April 1985. That had two main aims. First, it gave health authorities a check list against which to review urgently the organisation and effectiveness of their screening programmes.

Secondly, it asked them to introduce call systems in addition to the recall systems already required. They were asked to make immediate plans to introduce those computerised systems under arrangements made with family practitioner committees. That had become a practical and viable approach. Standard computer software had, with DHSS support, been developed by the Exeter family practioner services computer unit. It was stressed that the use of those systems had to be co-ordinated with the availability of laboratory services. My right hon. and learned Friend also announced that discussions with the professions and health authorities would be held on other measures for improving the effectiveness of the existing policy.

The particular points that my right hon. and learned Friend had in mind were to see in what other ways women most at risk could be reached; how the effectiveness of laboratory services for processing smears could be improved; and to explore ways of ensuring that there is always effective follow-up of abnormal results. The latter point arose directly from the problems experienced at Oxford.

Since April 1985 we have had feedback from authorities following the review that we asked them to conduct. This is the point that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras mentioned about questionaires. It became clear that many authorities were not proposing to proceed fast enough with the introduction of computerised call and recall systems.

As regards the effectiveness of laboratories, it also became apparent from discussions my right hon. and learned Friend had with British Society for Clinical Cytology that in many parts of the country there were

unacceptable backlogs in laboratory treatment of smears. Health authorities had not attached and were not attaching sufficient priority to the cervical screening programme and its needs.

As the House knows, each year Ministers review service priorities and then notify health authorities of any changes. The same circular gives regional authorities their resource assumptions. The 1986 circular has recently been issued. Item 6 is headed "Service priorities". Item 6a, headed "Cervical cancer screening" states:

"Ministers require Authorities to give priority to improving cervical cancer screening programmes (HC(84)17 and DA(85)8 refer). This should include ensuring that laboratories can meet demand and avoid backlogs (which should not regularly exceed one month's work) and arrangements are made with FPCs to implement computerised call and recall systems, no later than 1987-88. Details of action to be taken to complete achievement of these goals should be included in regional short term programmes due in the Department on 31 December 1986; and short term programme outturn reports due with the Department on 30 June 1986 and subsequently should record progress towards full implementation."

Thus, not only is cervical screening a national priority, but the whole apparatus for monitoring NHS performance is to be called upon to ensure that that priority is reflected in plans and action on the ground.

Comments have been made about resources. The full implementation of computerised call and recall systems will not require major new resources. I am advised that the health authorities will require about £4 million to install the necessary systems.

Similarly, if every health authority needed to employ another person in their laboratories it would cost about the same amount. This must be set in the context of the resources already being devoted to the cervical cancer screening programme, which are estimated at between £20 million and £30 million. The steps now taken will target this expenditure much more effectively.

The overall cost must be put in the context of the extra £650 million which will be spent next year on the hospital and community health services, and the further increases of £470 million and £450 million outlined in the public expenditure White Paper, planned for the following two years.

Mr. Litherland: Is the Minister aware that smears have been sent to private laboratories and even to other countries, such as Sweden and Holland? Where is the money coming from? If moneys can be afforded for that, why can they not be afforded for facilities in this country?

Mr. Hayhoe: Getting the appropriate tests carried out in the most cost-effective and efficient way must be a matter for local decision. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman seeks to ensure the most cost-effective use of resources or whether he has some other consideration in mind. The most cost-effective use of resources, directed towards the needs of potential patients, must be the guide.

In addition to the extra £650 million that I have mentioned for the next financial year, 1986-87, that will go to the hospital and community health services, authorities also have the benefit of their growing cost improvement programmes, which achieved £100 million worth of resources for extra deployment in 1984-85 and £150 million planned in 1985-86, and I expect them to achieve significantly better results in 1986-87.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred to the "Newsnight" programme on 18 December. It shows the paucity of the material available to him that he has sought to quote and exploit the highly selective extracts that were used from a 20-minute interview that I gave to the BBC. About three minutes were carefully sliced out —out of sequence—and portrayed in conditions that sometimes, I fear, one comes to expect from our television programmes. They tend not always to present matters in a wholly fair and impartial fashion. It was interesting, because the hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that he gave an interview and he commented on the programme, even though he had not seen it. I said that I was available to be in the studio.

Mr. Dobson: The programme in which I took part was today.

Mr. Hayhoe: The hon. Gentleman saw that programme, but the point I am making still stands. I was available to be interviewed live, but that offer was refused because they preferred to take a long film interview and slice it up. The hon. Gentleman sought to make his point. I have put it into context to show its worth.

Much has been made by the hon. Gentleman about the fact that DHSS headquarters does not know the details of where and when laboratory backlogs occur. Such details are not collected centrally. We do not believe it right to use resources to seek information of that type.

Ministers set health authorities clear priorities. I have pointed out the clear priority that has been given to cervical cancer screening in the coming year. Those priorities are reflected in the short-term programmes of district health authorities and, through the regional health authorities, they are monitored through a system of outturn reports every year. The introduction of general management and its development within the service will make better use of those resources and avoid some problems that have been referred to in the past, which flow from bad management and inadequate planning. I am as worried as others about the backlogs that are occurring in too many places. Health authorities have been told that they are expected to provide a service which regularly achieves an outturn of results within a month. The existing systematic accountability arrangements will give us the tools to ensure that those results are achieved.

The hon. Gentleman dredged up the fact that I had postponed a meeting with the British Medical Association as clear evidence of my culpability and that of the Government. I must tell him that I meet the general medical services committee of the BMA from time to time. I understand from a letter, and I confirmed with the committee today, that it wished to tell me that the cervical cytology screening programme should be extended to include women aged over 20 at three-yearly intervals. That is not a new point. The expert committee on gynaecological cytology recommended five-yearly screening, but that advice will be reviewed at its meeting in April. It has been advised of the BMA's representations, and I am sure that they will be taken into account. Therefore, the points that the committee wished to put are already being considered.

It is absurd and ludicrous to suggest that that committee was unwilling to put its views in written representation and advice that would be considered by officials and experts at the DHSS and that the meeting with me was crucial. Its views are being taken into account by the expert committees, and their reports will come to me.

Reference has also been made to breast cancer. To date, cervical cancer is the only form of female cancer for which

[Mr. Hayhoe]

mass screening is of proven value, but the prospects for the early detection of breast cancer are promising. Extensive trials on the effectiveness of different methods of breast cancer screening, funded by the Government, are in hand. The trials, which began in 1979 and are expected to report in 1988, cost about £750,000 a year and involve 250,000 women. They are part of a Government-funded research programme that also covers the economic, social and psychological aspects of mass screening.

My officials and advisers keep in touch with the findings of overseas studies. Last year's report of the study conducted in Sweden appeared to remove many of the doubts previously attached to breast cancer screening by mammography.

The fairest and most sensible comment made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was his tribute to the speedy action taken by my predecessor who, on behalf of other United Kingdom Health Ministers, established an expert working party under the chairmanship of Professor, now Sir, Patrick Forrest. We have received an interim report from Sir Patrick, copies of which I shall soon place in the Library. The interim report concluded that there is a convincing case on clinical grounds for a change in United Kingdom policy on the provison of mammographic facilities and the screening of symptomless women aged 50 and over. The report also concluded that it would not be sensible to introduce such screening on a United Kingdom basis without ensuring that the necessary back-up services were available.

That is a preliminary view only of the group, and it will be considered in detail for its final report. In that report, the group is expected to set out policy options, their costs and benefits and overall implications for the NHS throughout the United Kingdom. The final report is expected later this year and, as with the interim report, copies will be placed in the Library and the Government will respond as quickly as possible.

The Opposition motion and the speech of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras show that this is nothing more or less than opportunistic politicking. However much criticisms of Government action since May 1979 may be justified—with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to make such points—it does not lie in the mouths of Labour party spokesmen to make those charges. They have nothing to boast about. Their fury shows the measure of their guilt. Apart from initiating cervical screening for women aged over 35 at five-yearly intervals in 1966—20 years ago—the Labour Governments of 1966-70 and 1974-79 have a record of complacency and inaction. In contrast, this Government's record is better. We have increased the number of cervical smears taken by 30 per cent. a year. Of course, I shall not be satisfied until the call and recall system that I have described is fully operational.

Perhaps the debate will persuade more women—especially those who do not come forward in sufficient numbers, but who have been identified by the experts as a target group that one must persuade—to ask for tests. Indeed, we must persuade all women who meet the conditions to which I referred to do so. If the debate helps to persuade those women to come forward for testing, it will have been worth while. I hope that the House will reject the Opposition motion and support the action that the Government are taking to deal with this important matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must echo Mr. Speaker's plea for brief speeches.

8.47 pm

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): The Minister has the nerve to attack the Labour party for the shortcomings in this area of medicine. The Conservative Government have had six years in office to do something about it, but the amendment tabled by the Government shows that they do not even propose to introduce a recall system until 1988. It is scandalous. In the meantime, every surgeon to whom one talks and every leader in medical journals attacks the shortage of provision for dealing with cancer of the breast and cervical cancer. The Minister is trying to hide his inefficiency and the Government's refusal to provide the resources that are needed.

In America, Sweden, Holland and many other countries, trials have been carried out on many thousands of women which have demonstrated conclusively the value of screening for breast cancer, on which I wish to concentrate. There has been a 30 to 40 per cent. reduction in the risk of dying from breast cancer within 10 years of detection, and there is no doubt that women who are involved in screening programmes have a lower mortailty rate from breast cancer than those who do not have that opportunity. It is accepted that the early detection of small tumours makes it possible to avoid removing the breast and may even reduce the need for radiotherapy. Early detection is the key to success.

The Government so far have not been willing to introduce a proper screening programme for all women at risk in that age group. They claimed that the cost was prohibitive. In America, the cost of screening has been put at $12 for each patient and $2,000 for each cancer detected. The Canadian trial cost $25 for both mammography screening and clinical examinations. Here in Britain, the current estimate for mammography is £10 a patient. The Minister might want to comment on that figure later. To that figure must be added the cost of nurse and medical counselling to assist those women found to be positive. When one takes into account the savings in treatment of advanced cancer which would be avoided by early cure, clearly it is good value for money to introduce a screening programme.

Screening requires very competent technical and clinical techniques. It therefore ought to be provided on the National Health Service where we can be confident that doctors, nurses and technicians will provide a high standard of service. I hope that the Minister will not be tempted to say that screening could also be provided in the private sector. Screening is not an area for private profit. There are skilled breast cancer teams here which are desperately frustrated at being unable to offer that service to women and they are very angry at the lack of resources to treat patients.

The Minister told the House that he intends to set up, in conjunction with breast cancer treatment teams, mammographic screening units with their own computerised call and recall systems. A start ought to be made in NHS areas that have a good computerised family

practitioner committee report system and a breast cancer register. A start should be made immediately where the preparation has already been done.

Our services are utterly inadequate. They will first have to be improved before a national breast cancer screening programme can be introduced. There should be a considerable increase in the number of consultant radiologists and radiographers. The Minister did not say anything about that. If we extend a screening programme, who will read the X-rays and who will operate on the patients who are found to be positive?

At present, consultant radiologists are being appointed who have no experience in mammography. What are they supposed to do? Training facilities will be needed, particularly in high quality techniques, and mobile units could in due course provide screening for more women. Why is the Minister not proposing to have more mobile units where women can be screened quickly? Why is not the Minister proposing to set up such units in shopping centres, as many other counries do, where screening can be rapidly carried out?

There is no doubt that screening for breast cancer can save lives. We need a screening service of high standards and more information to encourage informed public debate. Above all, we need to provide facilities that can treat and call women rapidly into the hospital service if they are found to be positive. Perhaps the Minister who is to reply will say what the Government intend to do to provide that resource. It is not enough just to screen; there must be follow-up and action.

8.55 pm

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am certain that every woman in the land was shocked and horrified by the case to which my right hon. Friend the Minister referred in his opening remarks of the unfortunate Oxford woman who died after having her tests duly taken and who was not told of the outcome.

To have a system of smears without a proper follow-up and notification is, in many ways, worse than having no smear programme at all. Women who have had the test and who then hear nothing are lulled into a false sense of security. I therefore welcome the great effort made by my right hon. and learned Friend the former Minister of Health to extend full facilities to the whole of the country. The programme outlined tonight reveals the positive actions which have been taken by the Government in picking up the broken and even non-existent pieces left by the Labour Government. The programme announced in April 1985 was intended to improve the standard of care in all districts to that of the best.

I am fortunate, as I mentioned earlier, in coming from a district health authority which has always taken its responsibilities very seriously indeed. For the past 15 years, long before it became fashionable we have had a very tight recall system and we shall soon have a completely computerised family practitioner committee service. We are also fortunate in the speed with which tests are undertaken and results obtained. We have at Lancaster Moor hospital not only a top cytologist, Dr. Morris, but also an internationally known microbiologist, Dr. Telford.

We hold cytology clinics whenever they are required. As soon as 20 people want a test—approximately every four days—a clinic is held. No one need wait more than four or five days. The clinics are held at a wide variety of places—baby clinics, gynaecology clinics and family planning clinics. Local GPs pounce on the women who come into their surgeries for other reasons and whom they then persuade to have a smear test immediately. Nobody slips through the net. Results from our clinics are known within four days. All women seen at the clinics are informed of the results within four days.

For historical reasons, some tests from my area are still sent to Christies where it is true that the waiting time is longer. I very much hope, as I have family connections with that hospital, that that problem will be overcome in the not too distant future. The coverage of women in our district is rising every year. It is essential that these high standards should be available to women wherever they live.

A recent study was carried out in Manchester to discover why women who had developed invasive cancer of the cervix had not been detected at a pre-invasive stage by screening. By far the most common reason was that they had simply never been screened. That applied to two thirds of the total sample and four fifths of the women over 40 who were particularly at risk. Failure to follow up abnormal cytology results accounted for a horrifying 15 per cent. of deaths. That latter figure makes my blood boil. Actually to have the test and not be properly followed up is totally inexcusable.

Health authorities have a responsibility to the whole of the population they serve. A five-yearly programme which reaches a high proportion of women, including older women, and which ensures action on those found positive, is clearly preferable in my view to repeated smears on a small number of women. I know that some younger women are developing very fast growing cancers. Even annual screening would not pick up all those as they are so fast growing. However, to get massive cover of the whole country is the first essential. That is why I welcome the initiative by my right hon. and learned Friend the former Minister of Health which is backed by the current Minister. I welcome the urgency with which the Government are following the initiative and monitoring progress by the various local health authorities.

9 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): It is easy always to castigate the Government for not responding to every health need. Sometimes, but not often, I have a little sympathy for Ministers because the health sphere is one in which it is easiest to point out failings, as it is impossible for resources to match expectations.

With cervical cancer, the results are conclusive. The Government purport to give priority to prevention but it is astonishing that they do not follow their words with better action. The evidence is conclusive. We have varying standards within the United Kingdom. Some health areas and districts perform better than others, screen more women and go beyond the guidelines to obtain better results.

The evidence from abroad on screening is far more conclusive. In Scandinavia, where there is a more homogeneous population, the conclusions can be demonstrated. A national scheme was started in Iceland in 1960. Within 10 years it had reached 90 per cent. of women aged between 25 and 70. The aim was to screen them at two to three-yearly intervals. In 1978, the incidence of cervical cancer had decreased to 30 per cent. of the 1965 figure. Similarly, in Finland, screening reaches 90 per cent. of women aged between 30 and 59,

[Mr. Michael Meadowcroft]

with a five-year recall interval. The incidence has been halved. Sweden offers four-yearly screening to women aged between 30 and 49. The incidence is down to 60 per cent. of its previous level. The crucial point is that in Norway where there is no national screening organisation incidence has increased. It is now 15 per cent. above the 1965 level.

With such conclusive evidence, it is astonishing that the Government do not respond by extending screening. Evidence from this country suggests that where the payment to general practitioners operates according to the guide lines, and where the screening is within the intervals and age groups set out, the incidence of cervical cancer in those age groups is declining slowly. Presumably, there are some benefits from screening.

As has been mentioned, the incidence of cervical cancer in younger women is increasing. Why do the Government not respond to the statistics by improving and increasing the screening of younger women?

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) mentioned breast cancer and the encouraging results in Sweden. If the results of the trials are as conclusive as they are for cervical cancer, and if there is clear evidence that there would be benefits from screening for breast cancer, will the Government undertake to introduce a scheme similar to that recommended for cervical cancer?

Cost has been mentioned. I know that we did not have much notice of the debate, but within the time constraint I endeavoured to find whether there was any comparison of the cost of screening compared to the expensive intervention required later. I do not suggest that the cost is the most important factor. The human factor is far the most important. I could not find any evidence to suggest that there was no cost benefit from screening and prevention compared with the massive cost of chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery. It is strange that the Government do not save money by increasing and improving screening.

The importance placed on cost is shown by the fact that on 20 January the Leeds west district health authority minuted that it was looking for economies and that

"cervical cytology must be kept within budget".

If health authorities are so strapped for cash that they have to pass a minute which is looking for economies, it shows the desperate position in which they are. That is despite the fact that the number of deaths of cervical cancer in Leeds is above the national average.

Recall is crucial. In Leeds, it is still done manually. Despite the fact that it has been agreed to base computerisation on the family practitioner committee records, we still have no date when that will be achieved. The position in Leeds seems to be a shambles, but not the same shambles as there is in Liverpool, where the records of 100,000 women were wiped off the computer in one fell swoop. Efforts are now being made to reconstitute the records.

Pressure for the changes and improvements needed will come from the women's movements. I hope that the pressure to introduce well-woman clinics will gain momentum. I hope that the bid for a well-woman clinic in Leeds which is to be put into the 1986-87 urban programme application will succeed.

I wonder whether the position of cervical cancer screening would be different if it were a male problem. I wonder whether any Government would be able to respond in the way this Government have—slowly and partially—if 20,000 men were diagnosed as suffering from a male cancer and 2,000 were dying from it each year.

The prevention of cervical cancer is crucial. The evidence and the facts are available. It is reprehensible that the Government do not progress faster and more comprehensively with what is needed.

9.4 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): My qualification, such as it is, for speaking in this debate—apart from the fact that I am one of the few Members who have been able to have a cervical cancer test—is that several years ago I had some experience in this matter when I was involved with the Central Birmingham health authority.

The West Midlands regional health authority had a cervical smear campaign and came to us and said that it wished to do a lot more smears and wished to expand its campaign. It was not entirely clear why it wished to do so, but we co-operated with the campaign. We co-operated with great enthusiasm with many adverts, leaflets and posters. Twenty thousand more tests were done over a few weeks and we were all pleased with ourselves because it was all concerned with preventive medicine.

When I attended the next meeting of the district management team of my authority I had a rude awakening. The chairman of the medical executive committee, a clinical chemist, who was the consultant member of the team was apoplectic with rage. He asked me if I had realised what our smear campaign had done. I was rather nonplussed by that and asked what he meant. He told me that we had jammed up every laboratory in the entire west midlands with the smear slides, which were stacked up everywhere. The laboratory girls were bleary-eyed having to look down microscopes and were having to work overtime every night. There was a backlog of enormous proportions and every other type of laboratory work which they had been trying to do had ground to a halt. He said that we had not saved a single life and asked us to put a stop to the campaign.

I turned to the specialist in community medicine, who usually backed the schemes that I got up to, Dr. Rod Griffiths — I spoke to him this afternoon and he confirmed my recollections of this meeting—and asked if it was true. He confirmed that it was and that the same women were coming forward in the campaign, mainly low risk women, the vast majority of whom had already been tested but who were now coming forward yet again. The high risk women in whom we should have had more interest were not reached by the campaign. I venture to suggest that many of the resources that we were tying up in those laboratory tests were costing lives elsewhere in other campaigns which we all hold dear, such as perinatal mortality.

This is the experience all over the country and it is a classic case of what happens all the time in the National Health Service when we chuck resources at problems—in fact we pride ourselves on how we chuck resources at problems. Opposition Members demand that we chuck more resources at problems, but it does not solve the problems. We are spending over £30 million a year on cervical screening and over 3 million tests a year are done.

However, the death rate in England and Wales is dropping by only 1 per cent. a year, but it was dropping at the same rate before 1965 when there was no screening system. We still have over 2,000 deaths a year.

We have a test which is efficient and which will identify the illness. It has a high rate of success in predicting the cancer. It is an illness that will kill and which, if not treated, is not likely to get better of its own accord. There are excellent chances of recovery if the cancer is treated and especially if it is treated early. In other words, we have all the tools of success and we have plenty of resources. There is no lack of resources; the Government have been immensely generous and they are to be congratulated. The programme, however, cannot be regarded by any means as a raving success.

Two recent matters have been mentioned. The first was the scandal at Oxford when a positive test was not communicated to the patient, who subsequently died. That is not a matter of resources. The bulk of resources are needed in the laboratory and that work was done. The piece of paper was sent back and was put into the lady's file, but nobody got round to telling her. That was due to sheer bloody incompetence. Chucking more resources at that health authority will not help the authority.

I share the view of many hon. Members that it is scandalous for women to wait for those answers. The pattern in the country is highly erratic. In my health authority, South Derbyshire health authority, women wait about four to six weeks, which is acceptable. Next door in Nottingham there is a waiting time of six months and that is not acceptable by anybody's standards. A recent survey showed that 59 per cent. of the women in Nottingham with positive tests were never followed up. Somebody in Nottingham needs shooting, and I would happily volunteer to do it. That record is an absolute disgrace, and there are other health authorities where the same is true.

A more virulent strain affecting especially young people has emerged recently. Getting at those young people might require a different type of campaign. If it means doing tests in schools and colleges, let us do it. It is simple. It does not take long or much in the way of equipment. Only a wooden spatula is needed. There is no need for people to go to clinics. If it means that we have to run a campaign in the *New Musical Express* rather than in *Woman's Own*, let us do that.

Although it is true that the death rate for the under-35s has doubled in 10 years——

Mrs. Dunwoody: Trebled.

Mrs. Currie: Has doubled in 10 years.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Trebled.

Mrs. Currie: I can quote the hon. Lady the figures if she wants.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If they came from the Minister's Department I should have doubts about them.

Mrs. Currie: They came from the *British Medical Journal*, if the hon. Lady wants to know. The death rate among the under-35s has doubled in 10 years. However, the death rate among young women is still one-twentieth of that among older women such as the hon. Lady, with respect to her, and 94 per cent of all deaths as a result of cervical cancer are among the over-35s. The advice being given to my right hon. and hon. Friends is quite right.

The fact is that 80 per cent. of those aged over 40 who die have never had a test, so bumping up the number of smears merely wastes resources. All we do is re-test those who have already been tested. The same is true for the recall programme. All it does is enable us to re-test people and therefore add to the number of negative tests. The task is to get at the older women who do not know how to ask, who do not know what we are talking about, especially those who think that the campaign does not mean them. Older women feel that the publicity aimed at younger women, especially sexually active women, seems not to apply to them, especially if they have ceased to be sexually active. The problem is—how?

I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends are aware of the *British Medical Journal* issue of 6 October 1984, which went into this matter in great detail. One of the articles considered a general practitioner system and showed that they can be highly effective—a 96 per cent. uptake was reported in that study. In all honesty, we do not need vast complex computer systems. If I am considered a heretic, I can only say that that is what the research shows. Pushing buttons is not the answer; knocking on doors is.

Mortality has fallen sharply in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. However, exactly the same has happened in Norway as in England. Norway put a lot more resources into the screening programme, but the mortality rate has not dropped more than it would have done if the screening programme had not been in place. Why? I asked Professor George Knox, the professor of social medicine at Birmingham university, who used to advise me in days gone by. He said that the countries that had succeeded had "put somebody in charge." They put a named person in charge of the programme. They did not in Norway and we have not. He said that we can choose to provide a laboratory service for clinicians—that is what the BMA will ask for—or we can choose to provide orders for the computer industry. That is a good thing if it is what we want. We could, however, choose to start reducing mortality, which is an entirely different objective. The way to do that is to designate one person, perhaps in each health authority, monitor his—or her—performance, not for input or for resources, but for results and to get him—or her—to cut across all the muddle.

Right hon. and hon. Members know that I share their concern. I think that it is possible to spend only half of what we now allocate to the service and to save nearly all the 2,000 lives that are being lost, by allocating the money to a named person in each health authority, telling it to get on with it and perhaps asking it to stop testing and retesting an infinite number of times fit 25-year-olds, but to get moving on their mothers.

The hon. Member for Holborn, and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) clearly thinks that he is God's gift to women. He is up the creek on this issue. My experience warns me that we should not make this issue a bandwagon. It is preventive medicine, but that does not automatically make it worth while. Universal screening is neither desirable nor necessary. Large-scale screening by traditional means will miss most of the potential victims. Meanwhile, I fear that the tie-up of large funds and scarce resources may cost lives and diminish welfare elsewhere, and may make progress on other forms of health care more difficult. I therefore counsel caution, and I look forward to cheaper and more effective real progress.

9.15 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) will forgive me if I do not follow her. I usually speak on rehabilitation, but my wife has asked me to speak on this issue tonight as she had a masectomy 14 years ago. It is a dreadful time for any family to live through. My wife was diagnosed as having cancer, but she has lived for 14 years. I can assure the hon. Lady that my wife is at risk, and she goes for tests at regular intervals. That is absolutely as it should be. In no way is any part of that effort wasted.

The effect of such a health problem on the family is quite devastating. I certainly could not cope well with it, and I do not know how my wife managed. We relied on the support and help of medical practitioners at the Maelor hospital in Wrexham. I am pleased to say that my wife enjoys good health, and handles the garden more effectively than I can. I am sure that her good health is due to the care, attention and continuous screening from which she benefits. When my wife returns from her screening and says, "It is OK today," my first response is, "Thank God," and a great sense of relief goes through the whole family. It is an incredible and unbelievable feeling. The next thing that she says is, "Why don't other people have this screening as well?"

The Minister said that more women should go for screening, and that is true. But they need to be invited for screening. The figures show that 90 per cent. of those invited for screening for either cancer of the breast or a cervical smear attend.

One group of people that I call in support of my point are the paramedical professionals and the nurses. I do so because the radiographers, physiotherapists and nurses are mainly women—and, sometimes, women know a lot more about the needs of women than do men. I speak only as a client in a position that is unique for me. I assure the House that the professional organisations that I represent in Parliament, both collectively and as individuals—and many of them are my close friends—urge that greater resources should be made available.

I intend to be brief so that as many hon. Members as possible may have an opportunity to speak. Certain costs are immeasurable. I refer to the cost to the family of the loss of loved ones. The numbers are substantial. It is not easy for a man to bring up a child without a mother. Those are the real social costs. As an economist, I believe that if we did our sums properly, if we did a real cost-benefit analysis taking both sides of the balance sheet, we would quickly recognise that the costs of treating and healing often more than outweigh the costs of screening and monitoring.

There must be a sense of urgency. Human beings are strange in that they are the only animals who laugh or cry and who realise the difference between things as they are and things as they should be. We know how things should be. We know that there should be continuous screening for breast and cervical cancer so that we can reduce the suffering for the family and the patients, and reduce the total costs.

When I speak about rehabilitation in the House I use an expression that people have heard repeatedly. The things about which we are talking are technically possible. They are certainly economically viable and morally right. The Government must show a sense of priority and, with the support of the Opposition, introduce a massive campaign to eradicate this disease from our country.

9.21 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I get very angry when I hear the sort of speeches that we have heard tonight from the Government Back Benches. We are facing an epidemic of cervical cancer, and the complacency shown today makes it difficult to defend the attitude of any Member of Parliament who could seriously make the comments that we have heard tonight.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of women with cervical pre-cancer in the United Kingdom in the past 15 years—an increase that has gone much faster in the past two years. The general 60 per cent. increase over the time covers a staggering 117 per cent. rise in the 25 to 34-year-old age group. The death rate from cancers that could have been avoided if the pre-cancers were treated has trebled in the past 10 years. In comparison, the Canadians and the Finns have halved their death rate, and, by two-year testing, increasing numbers in the 20 to 45-year-old group have been saved. The figure of 2,000 deaths could be halved if we were to follow sensible precautionary measures.

There has been talk about the amount of money involved. I must remind the Government of the simple fact that it costs £500,000 per life saved to build a motorway crash barrier. We know how keen the Government are on improving motorways. It would cost £25,000 per life saved if we were to provide proper screening services for all those at risk. Let us not be in any doubt. The NHS has had its money cut to such an extent that an increase of cervical screening of the kind being demanded would put an unacceptable burden on all the clinics concerned.

Less than a year ago, the Minister made a speech in which he said that the important thing was to screen those over 35, as they were most at risk and had to be considered first. There was a media campaign, and many more women went to clinics of their own volition to get the screening done. In many instances, district health authorities were unable to deal with the influx of numbers. Not only do they not have the staff, but the cuts in clerical and administrative staff, quite apart from medical facilities, have made it virtually impossible for them to set on foot even the basic follow-up provisions that are essential to the efficient running of such a system.

It is clear that all this should have been computerised a long time ago, but the investment in hardware and input is considerable. It cannot be found from within existing budgets. I know of one particular clinic which has had a 108 per cent. increase in the past year in the number of people that it is seeing, and a 124 per cent. increase in the numbers of new patients in that time. No hospital service can expand at that rate without a specific campaign by the Government to earmark more new money for it. The existing equations, by which the Government say that such clinics can have the money, provided that it is found from within the existing budget, is not what is needed. We need more new money for a campaign. If it is not forthcoming, we shall know that the Government's weasel words tonight can be simply explained.

If there were more women Members of Parliament, including Conservative Members, who were prepared not to waffle about how sufficient people are already being

tested — in reality it is only that more patients are returning to be re-tested—the subject would be debated seriously.

In reality, Ministers have not been prepared to consider this as a matter of great urgency, and women are dying every day because of that incompetence and intolerance of true priorities. I am ashamed to be a Member of a House of Commons which is prepared to allow Ministers to speak as the Minister did this evening.

9.25 pm

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): I am the first Scottish Member to take part in this United Kingdom debate. It is worthy of comment that throughout the debate no Scottish Back-Bench Tory Member or Scottish Minister responsible for the National Health Service in Scotland has attended for a minute. That is absolutely disgraceful behaviour, and irresponsible contempt of the House.

The Minister made great play of the cost effectiveness of the expenditure on the service. In an article in *The Times* during July 1985, Dr. Robert Yule, the director of Britain's biggest screening laboratory at the Christie hospital in Manchester, said about the cost:

"It is a tremendous bargain. It guarantees a cure if cancer of the cervix is detected early enough. There is nothing to compare with it."

We have repeatedly made that point to the House. When we consider the programme's cost effectiveness, the Government should say, "The sky is the limit," because the ultimate saving far outweighs the financial cost. The article continues:

"Yet the screening programme was described only last March as 'a shambles' and is seen by the medical profession as a relative failure."

The Minister, reeking with complacency, talked about the vast amount of additional cash that the Government were investing in the service, but declined to say that it was less than the rate of inflation. Hospital authorities are saying that that will mean reductions in the standards of service, not least in this area. The Minister spoke of an additional £3 million or £4 million, but on what pay assumptions is that made? There must be pay assumptions, unless the Government are saying that people performing such valuable work in the Health Service will not receive pay increases.

In 1980 a Royal Commission report on inequality in health was published, and then buried by the Government because its recommendations were too radical and expensive ever to be seriously considered by a Conservative Government. The Government were to preoccupied in undermining the basic concept of the Health Service, and encouraging the growth of private profiteering. That report was invaluable in underlining what was commonly believed but never before so thoroughly researched, which was that the poorer classes who desperately needed the Health Service were, generally speaking, the least well provided for. That is described as the "inverse care law": the availability of good medical care tends to vary in inverse proportion to the need of the population served. The report pointed out that women in classes 4 and 5—the poorer sections of the community—did not get that service. The mortality rate among those women was the highest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) rightly cited the Scottish figures because the position is much worse there than in the United Kingdom generally. In July 1985, a group practice in Fife referred in its letter to me to the cytology service in Fife which was normally provided by the Lothian health board. The board wrote to the doctors saying:

"You are probably aware that the Cervical Cytology Laboratory has an accumulation of 10,000 smears waiting to be read. This is an increase of almost 6,000 since January 1985. The delay in reporting which this represents is now unacceptable and the Board has also had to take into consideration the sheer practical difficulty of attempting to manage a service which is overstretched to such a degree."

An expert Committee has been consulted and has advised the Board on developments which are needed to meet the present level of demand. This will entail taking on new staff who will require several months' training. In the meantime, to deal with the backlog of work and to avoid dislocation of the service, it is necessary to impose a severe restriction in its use, for at least three to four months".

That means that services in Fife were set back because of inadequate provision in the Lothian area. Fife does not have a service of that kind, although I understand that progress is being made.

On all counts — health, social, economic and cost effectiveness grounds — it behoves the Government to take a long and hard look at this problem and to give women, who are dying in epidemic proportions, the great priority that we think they deserve.

9.32 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I am extremely sorry that the Minister for Health did not give more of his attention to this debate but spent so much time outside the Chamber. A number of interesting speeches to which he should have listened were made. We listened to his speech with disgust—that is all I can say for it.

The speech of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) was unbelievable. I thought that we were talking about the encouragement we should be giving women to return regularly for testing. The hon. Lady was saying that we should not be re-testing them.

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Lady knows that I share her interest in all the issues that affect women. I am interested in saving lives, not just in providing more and more resources to do exactly what we are doing now and seeing the death rate barely affected.

Ms. Richardson: We can save lives by constant screening. I point out to the hon. Lady a remark in *The Lancet* of 30 March 1985. Dr. Gillian Gau, consultant cytopathologist at Queen Charlotte's hospital, said:

"At the moment the middle class get the smears and the working class get the cancer."

That is true. I agree with the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South on one point: we need to campaign in different ways. However, that costs money and involves thought and planning. We are not doing what is needed. The Government's record on cervical screening offers practically no encouragement and hope to women that there will be a significant reduction in the number of women who can expect to die from breast cancer—one in 30 women—even though everyone knows that about 3,000 lives could be saved from breast cancer each year and a further 1,000 saved from cervical cancer if a properly resourced national screening programme were established now.

The Minister talked about the Government spending £650 million on the National Health Service over the next year. I wish that he had talked about billions rather than millions—*[Interruption.]* I say that in all seriousness.

[Ms. Richardson]

There is a need to spend much more and I hope that it will be recognised and acted upon. The Minister is virtually saying that we must choose our own priorities within the expenditure of £650 million. Instead, he should be setting the direction of priorities for the district health authorities.

Throughout their term of office the Tory Government have cynically exploited the complexities of Health Service finance with a view to misleading the public. They have hidden behind a barrage of distorted statistics and half-truths and have launched an unprecedented attack on every sector of the NHS. Anyone outside this place will say the same. Their attack on the Health Service has had far-reaching implications for women. There has been a reduction in services, and I read the other day of the threatened sale of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospital, the closure of the South London hospital for women and children — the Minister's predecessor refused to intervene to do anything about that—and the threat to the Soho hospital for women. These examples are indicative of the Government's refusal to respond to women's special circumstances and preferences in health care.

We are talking of increasing resources for the provision of high-technology equipment, which is crucial, and we must concern ourselves also with the type of services which women require and the way in which they are made available. That is an equally important factor.

Women are still expected to take the major responsibility of caring for the health of their families. With the emphasis that is now being placed on caring for the elderly, the infirm and the disabled within the community, women are shouldering increasingly heavy responsibilities, possibly with serious implications for their own health. They combine their domestic and caring commitments with paid employment, and many more families would be in dire poverty if they did not do so. However, very few people take sufficient account of the lack of time that is available to women to stop and think about their own health and to put their own needs first for a change. Far too few general practice surgeries or hospitals take women's multiple commitments into account when, as in most instances, men are planning the management of the services.

About 2·5 million women are screened each year for cervical cancer. That accounts for only 15 per cent. of the 16 million women between the ages of 20 and 65 years who should be using cancer screening services regularly. If the Government would for once listen to women, significant improvements could be made.

I am surprised that the Minister did not refer to the survey which was carried out by the Women's National Commission, the results of which were published in November 1985. The members of the commission are appointed principally by the Government and the commission is situated in the Cabinet Office. Its report confirmed yet again the consistent demands made by women, women's organisations, women's health groups and women in the trade union and Labour movement which they have been making for years. Of the 6,000 women who were surveyed, 70 per cent. expressed that they saw a need for doctors to hold at least one surgery a week in the evening. That need was expressed by nearly 85 per cent. of women who were working full time. More than half the women surveyed expressed the need for surgeries other than for emergencies only to be held on a Saturday morning, with more consultation time made available for each individual patient session, which means time to talk and to be heard.

The women surveyed expressed a preference—one which has been expressed for many years and of which no one has taken any notice—for the choice of treatment to be provided by women doctors and women staff. That preference was confirmed by the commission's survey. Of the 6,000, 72 per cent. supported the view that women should be offered the choice of consulting a woman doctor. When conditions specific to women only were involved, such as breast and cervical screening, the figure rose to 95 per cent. Only three health authorities of those which replied to the survey said that they could offer such a choice.

Those are avenues which the Government should be exploring to try to solve the problem. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that more than 85 per cent. of the women said that they would use a well-woman clinic if one were provided in their area. That figure rose to more than 90 per cent. in the 25 to 44-year age group.

I should like to ask the Minister a specific question. The Women's National Commission is a Government-appointed body which is situated in the Cabinet Office and presumably the Department of Health and Social Security looks at its reports. Therefore, when it recommended that the Government should draw up a

"code of practice for workplace health care",

including cervical and breast screening facilities as a guide for employers, why have the Government done nothing about it? The report goes on to say that the Government should set an example

"by extending the occupational health care of its own employees along these lines . . . building upon the Health Education Council discussion paper 'Health Education in the Workplace' and the Trades Union Congress paper 'Women's Health at Risk'."

It is extremely important that the Government should adopt those and other proposals and set an example for other employers.

It is true that in response to trade union pressure many workplaces have already established on-site screening programmes. About 10 trade unions are involved in that, but to save time I will not list them. However, one in particular, SOGAT '82, which has recently been in the news, bought its own caravan two years ago to help with mobile screening. That has been extremely useful in its negotiations with employers.

Dr. M. S. Miller: Will my hon. Friend also include family planning clinics in the list of organisations where a cervical test is done on everyone who goes to them?

Ms. Richardson: I am grateful to my hon. and, as has been said, medically learned Friend for reminding me of that.

Perhaps not many people will know it, but women from two of the trade unions in the Palace of Westminster have been trying for well over a year, to my knowledge, and with the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) and of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), to establish on-site screening in the Palace of Westminster. About 1,800 women work here at any one time. They work unsocial hours and they could have their cancer screening done here. Why do not the Government encourage the authorities to provide such a service?

I believe that it is a disgrace that the Government are not picking up all the initiatives which have been suggested. In fact, they are leaving it largely to a charity organisation, the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign, which carries out fundamental work by taking mobile screening facilities into shopping centres and housing estates as well as into the workplace. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East mentioned taking mobile cancer screening units into shopping centres. That is what we should be doing. That would answer the points which the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South made. The campaign has an all-women staff and it examines and screens between 20 to 25 women in each two-and-a-half-hour session at a cost of about £100 each session.

Those are precisely the services which the Government should be fully funding. I do not mean just giving them a little money to put out a few leaflets; I mean actually funding, encouraging, helping and buying the equipment to enable them to do the job.

Every trade union that is involved with workplace screening has reported a very high take-up rate. I hope that these examples will give the Government some ideas. However, as we have stressed in the motion, the success of these initiatives is dependent upon laboratory facilities and the technical and back-up staff who deal with the results. We have heard that the situation is scandalous, but the Government have not said that they will do anything that will result in a marked improvement. No comprehensive provision is made for a breast screening service, with a call and recall back-up. The cervical screening service has been allowed to descend into chaos and confusion.

Women are confronted with confusing and conflicting information and advice about when to start using the service and at what age and about the safe length of time between each examination and smear test. They are faced with an insufficient choice of places and available times and with a lack of women staff and doctors. Last, though by no means least, they face increasing insecurity and lack of confidence because the system is incapable of producing a fail-safe follow-up should their examination or smear indicate that action needs to be taken.

I invite right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches to remember that half of their constituents are women, some of whom will probably die if the Government do not get on with the job and use the information and evidence already available to them. They should campaign effectively to prevent the death of women who otherwise would be able to live a happy life.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): First, I wish yet again to make it clear, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health said, that the Government are far from satisfied about the provision for cervical cancer screening. The district health authorities know about our concern. Let me explain why we have concentrated upon using the health authority system to provide this service. The country tried to adopt a national approach but it did not work. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said that the national recall system was outdated, outmoded and unsuccessful. We can at least agree about that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have returned to the Chamber especially to hear the hon. Member.

Mr. Whitney: I am more than usually honoured, Mr. Speaker.

The Government decided therefore to use the health authority system. We are very concerned that the response so far has not been satisfactory in all areas. The recall system needs to be improved. Greater efforts must be made to clear the backlog in laboratories. The delays are unacceptable. Our target is an average delay of four weeks.

Let me outline what the Government have done, what they are doing and what we intend to do. As for resources, when the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) wound up the debate for the Opposition she seemed to be blithely indifferent about whether she was referring to an increase in National Health Service spending next year of £650 million—although it is actually £670 million—or £650 billion. The amount is £670 million. The hon. Lady was happy to say that it should be £650 million. The hon. Lady was not making a joke, so that is a measure of her economic illiteracy. Hon. Members should recognise that increased resources have been made available through the National Health Service.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton), among others, suggested that the amount devoted to cervical cancer screening did not reflect the rate of inflation. The answer is precisely the opposite. In the next financial year the resources will increase by no less than £[illegible] million, which represents a significant increase above the projected rate of inflation. The same is true for the following two years. So there can be no doubt that resources are available for the services that we have been discussing. As my right hon. Friend said, we are talking of £4 million for the computerised system and a similar sum for the technicians who will be required.

Mr. Litherland: The Minister is talking about resources. Would he like to visit the cytology department at Christie hospital in Manchester where he would see the prefabricated huts that the staff have to work in? Perhaps he could convince Dr. Yule that he has enough resouces to cope with the backlog of 35,000 smears. It is a disgrace for the Minister to talk as he is doing.

Mr. Whitney: I shall be happy to discuss with health authority chairmen, as we discuss with all regional chairmen who in turn have discussions with district chairmen, the high priority which should be given to screening and to laboratory provision.

In January we published guidelines for health authorities. No authority should be in doubt about the priority we have given to cervical cancer screening. March 1988 is the target for computerised systems to be introduced but I shall be very disappointed if the programme is not complete before then. It is important and obviously must be carried out carefully. Studies have been set in train in Exeter to ensure that the best methods are used. The results of the studies are being implemented by other health authorities.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister think that Bolton health authority is making wise spending by employing outside consultants to second-guess the proposals of the Exeter unit?

Mr. Whitney: The hon. Gentleman must direct that question to Bolton health authority. The resources given to that authority are adequate to fulfil the demands made upon it in this sphere.

Dr. M. S. Miller: The Minister has said that he hopes the computerised system will be operative by March 1988. Surely in the meantime he will not delay having smears done even with the inadequate facilities that are available.

Mr. Whitney: Indeed not. The programme is increasing all the time and we have been assured that progress is being made. Of course, as has been said several times already from the Dispatch Box, we must have faster progress. That is precisely the message that we are communicating to health authorities.

A point of great interest to many hon. Members is what should be done about breast cancer. Cervical cancer accounts only for the minority of deaths of women from cancer. We are, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, funding a series of extensive trials on the effectiveness of different methods of breast cancer screening and those trials, which began in 1979, are expected to report in, perhaps, two years' time. They are costing £750,000 a year and involve about 250,000 women. Those are part of a Government-funded research programme and also cover the economic and psychological aspects of mass screening.

But, as has been pointed out, and as we all recognise, progress has now been made in Sweden in particular and some of the doubts about breast screening by mammography appear to have been removed. There again, the Government acted quickly, and as my right hon. Friend pointed out, established the committee under Professor Sir Patrick Forrest. We have now received its interim report. My right hon. Friend advised the House of the details of that interim report and, as he said, we shall seek to respond quickly to that.

The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) referred to a number of possible ways in which we may respond to the possibilities of breast screening. One of the major elements in the terms of reference of the study group was

"to suggest a range of policy options and assess the benefits and costs associated with them, and set out the service planning, manpower, financial and other implications of implementing such options."

The record of the Government and the Conservative party compared with that of the Labour party makes it difficult for the House to understand why the Opposition should call a debate of this nature and produce the sort of speeches that we have heard from the Labour Benches tonight. We recognise that the problem is serious and that what has been done so far is not sufficient. Much more has to be done. Let me remind the House what we have done and what the Labour party in eight or nine years of Government failed to do.

It is true that in October 1966—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Gentlemen may laugh, but we have to go back 20 years to the last and only action that the Labour party took in this important area. In October 1966 the Labour party asked health authorities to introduce cervical screening for women over 35 years. After that, all the running has been left to Conservative Governments. We have a record in that regard which compares favourably with that of Labour Members.

For example, in 1971 the then Government announced that a reform would be undertaken of the Health Service register at Southport and that started in 1972. In 1973 the Government asked the health authorities to extend the priority group to include women under 35 with three or more pregnancies.

When the Government came to power in 1980 we reviewed the scheme with the expert committee and it was found that the national recall system was not working satisfactorily. Only 20 per cent. of women recalled responded, whereas it was shown that the response achieved to local schemes was about 60 per cent. That is why we moved to the local authority basis. We consulted in 1981 and thereafter instituted a system of local recall. That system was approved in 1981 and launched in April 1983. However, we have been dissatisfied with the results and there was the sad case of the affair in Oxford. My right hon. and learned Friend the present Paymaster General announced further improvements in April 1985, which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health has outlined. The further reviews that we have announced today, the challenge of the computerised health service, and the resources we are devoting to it, show yet again that, instead of words, we offer results.

Mr. James Hamilton (Motherwell, North) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 209, Noes 281.

Division No. 63] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Cornett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald

Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Don Dixon.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven

Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Donald Thompson and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House commends the Government for its positive action to ensure that by 1988 all health districts will have computerised call and recall systems and adequate laboratory back up for cervical cancer screening; and welcomes the establishment of an expert working group to examine urgently the available evidence on breast cancer screening and to propose a range of policy options for implementation within the National Health Service.

Coal Industry (State Aids)

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9316/85, and supports the Government's intention to ensure that the new rules governing state aids for the coal industry should continue to take full account of the United Kingdom's objective of achieving a smooth transition to a sound and viable industry.

The document before us underlines the important link between the Government's priorities for the United Kingdom's coal industry and the vital part played by coal in the European Community's energy strategy.

Since the European Commission announced its intention to introduce a new regime for state aids, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has taken a firm line. He made it abundantly clear to the Commission last spring that while we had no objection in principle to a well-thought-out regime, it was important that it should be workable within the member states most affected by it —West Germany, France, Belgium, now Spain, and, above all, ourselves.

The House may be assured that the Government's early and robust line has borne fruit. The United Kingdom has greatly influenced the contents of the proposal, but there is no room for complacency and, as I shall demonstrate, much work remains to be done in Brussels before the United Kingdom can sign up to a final decision.

The present regime was drawn up to take account of the need to maintain an economic Community coal industry. it was part of a strategy designed to maintain the security of Community energy supplies following the 1973 oil shock. The key objective was to achieve a balance between maintaining Community coal production and the necessary competitive conditions whereby production was rationalised and costs reduced.

The existing decision covers the following main points: financial support towards grants for operating and social costs paid by member states to their coal industries; grants towards liabilities relating to past closures; forecasts of production and sales of coal; proposals for new development over a five-year period; and the build up and holding of coal stocks.

Member states are required to seek authorisation under the existing regime before paying grants. In practice, however, the Commission has adopted a pragmatic approach and taken account of the varying circumstances of the member states involved.

The 10 years which have elapsed since the present decision was introduced have seen major changes in the coal industries of the member states most concerned— France, Belgium, West Germany and the United Kingdom. In recent years, rationalisation has occurred in the industries of all those member states, but with each choosing to approach matters according to their circumstances. Belgium and France have concentrated on the reduction of manpower and capacity. France, for example, is on target to reduce manpower from 70,000 to 30,000 in the years 1983 to 1988 and to reduce production from 17 million tonnes to 10 million tonnes. In the United Kingdom greater emphasis has been placed on improving productivity and operating costs. All four member states will, of course, continue to have an interest in the new state aids regime. We expect, too, that Spain will share this because it will also face similar problems as it settles into its Community membership.

The draft decision proposes a more limited range of operating aids to member states' coal industries—deficit aid, sales aid for coking coal, investment aids and salary supplements. Of these, only deficit grant is of direct concern to the United Kingdom. In addition, the decision would permit a range of social grants to be made, covering redundancy and pension costs and other historical costs arising from pit closures in the past.

The main changes which the European Commission now proposes are that aids should be allowable only for improving productivity, for providing new economically viable capacity and for solving social and regional problems. It also means that certain types of aid—for recruitment and coal stocks—should be eliminated.

The Commission also wishes to alter the dates by which member states are required to submit information and are proposing dates which have no practical meaning in the context of United Kingdom financial years. What is of greatest importance, however, is that the Commission has made it clear that it intends to implement more rigorously than hitherto the letter of the decision. Therefore, although the Government support the principle behind the decision, which is compatible with our domestic objectives for the coal industry, we also regard it as of paramount importance that the new decision should be workable.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I am a little puzzled by my hon. Friend's remarks now and by his remarks in the explanatory memorandum, in which he said that one of the proposed changes to the existing regime is:

"Lack of defined criteria by which Commission are to judge acceptability of proposed aids."

My hon. Friend then says in the memorandum, as he has just said to the House:

"If the Commission were to exercise without sensitivity their proposed powers to limit state aids . . . they would jeopardise the achievement of NCB's primary objective which is to break even by 1987-88."

Is it the Government's view that the Commission is being too tough or too soft?

Mr. Hunt: We believe that in setting the objectives the Community has got the overall thrust of its policies correct. The Government are determined to achieve at the March Energy Council—I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend has to say if he has an opportunity to develop his points more fully—a system which not only follows through in the direction of the objective which we support but does so in a way which will enable the National Coal Board to achieve the break even point and will enable the regime which is introduced to be workable.

The Commission, in putting forward the proposals, has sought to increase its control over the granting of aids by member states. Its concern, rightly, is that aids should not cut across the precepts of the Common Market. Member states, on the other hand, especially the United Kingdom and the West Germans, are equally concerned to ensure that Brussels should not impose unacceptable constraints upon us in respect of matters which are essentially for us to determine. We have been making our views very clear and shall continue to do so as negotiations continue.

The general objective of the draft decision marks the greatest difference from the existing regime, and I have

[Mr. Hunt]

already referred to that in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon). The existing regime was based largely on the notion that the Community's coal industry still had to face a major reduction in capacity and that Government support would be justified throughout such a period. The new decision sounds a more positive note, which the Government can entirely endorse. It looks forward to a more competitive coal industry able to open up new economically viable reserves. This will provide an appropriate framework for the Government's continued support for the NCB's investment in the industry and with the social costs of restructuring. Much of the NCB's investment goes to improve existing long-life collieries. As hon. Members will be aware, last year the board announced many investment programmes to open new faces, install new machinery and computerise the monitoring of mining operations.

I hope that hon. Members will get the opportunity this evening to pay tribute to the magnificent efforts of men and management alike in achieving, for the first time in the board's history, deep mined output in excess of 3 tonnes per man shift. That is a tremendous achievement, and I hope that much reference will be made to it in the debate tonight.

With restructuring and improved productivity performance, the NCB will be on target for break-even in 1987-88 and thereafter able to progress to the establishment of a secure and self-sustaining industry.

I am sure that many hon. Members have important points to raise this evening, and I do not want to take up the time which is available for discussion. However, perhaps I could just remind hon. Members of the key points which arise from the new state aids proposals.

First, there is nothing new or sinister about the state aids regime. This proposal will replace a regime that has been in existence in various forms since 1965. Secondly, the proposal does not involve the payment of Community funds to member states. It allows member states to support their own coal industries without infringing the European Coal and Steel Community treaty. It would, of course, be open to us to refuse to sign the new regime, but that would be to no good purpose as it would mean that our payments of operating aids and social grants would be illegal. Thirdly, it is important that the new regime should be workable within the individual member states most concerned, and for as long as necessary. The United Kingdom's clearly expressed objective is to achieve a flexible and workable regime.

Those objectives are entirely consistent with those of our own coal industry. The regime will enable us to meet our targets.

The objective of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, when this matter goes to the March Energy Council, will be to ensure that the new regime gives maximum flexibility to member states in the challenging task of creating economically viable Community coal industries which can compete successfully in the world market.

10.26 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): We are proud of our miners, we are proud of our industry and we are proud of our efforts to raise productivity. We are also jealous of the technological expertise of our mining engineers.

Perhaps I might introduce a controversial note to the debate. There is an absence in it. Previously, we have always had briefs from the National Coal Board setting out its approach, but the silence from Hobart house on this is deafening. Have any of my hon. Friends received a comment from the NCB?

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I have.

Mr. Eadie: The hon. Gentleman is very fortunate. None of my hon. Friends has received any comments. That is sad, because it is our industry. When our industry is affected, the NCB has a duty, as a publicly-owned industry, to make its attitude known.

Mr. Fallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eadie: No. I want to be brief. We are fully aware of the background to these proposals. Current Community provision for the industry expired on 31 December 1985. The Minister explained why there had to be a new proposition. The House must be made aware of the fact that this is an attempt by the Commission to get control of member countries' coal industries. Apart from the usual stranglehold of a bureaucratic structure it has not made a very good job of it. I call in aid the Minister who had some reservations about the outline of the document.

The Commission has not made a good job of the draft directive, because its analysis is faulty on so many points. It merits the criticism that has been heaped on it by some member states. My information is that this is the fourth or fifth draft of the proposals. We could not have a better portrayal of uncertainty than that.

A report in the *Financial Times* on 25 September 1985 stated:

> "The United Kingdom Energy Secretary has made it clear that because there is virtually no intra-Community trade in coal there is no case for Brussels control."

To some extent, the Minister expressed that same sentiment in his speech tonight.

It would not be unfair if I expanded what the Secretary of State expressed through the *Financial Times*. The EEC countries produce coal for their local markets. British coal does not compete for the German market, and vice versa. Therefore, it is hard to understand why Brussels should intervene.

I had a word with the Secretary of State before the debate. He assured me that when the matter comes before the Energy Ministers Council on 3 March, he will stand by what he expressed in the *Financial Times* and will not accept control by Brussels of the United Kingdom coal industry. On that basis, and because we are considering only a take-note motion, the Opposition will not divide the House. That is reasonable.

The House should be aware of the turmoil caused by an earlier draft of Commissioner Mosers' proposals. It resulted in a political dressing down for him from the Federal Republic of Germany, which threatened to use its veto. The draft report would have resulted in 500,000 Europeans landing on the scrap heap by the 1990s. The argument was that it would have resulted in a saving of £2 billion a year in state subsidies for coal. But that would have to be set against a £2·4 billion a year increase in social costs. That is lunatic economics. The net result would have been a drain of almost £500 million on European treasuries each year.

In Germany, the loss of one third of mining jobs would have added 20 per cent. to the Federal Government's

borrowing requirement. In Belgium, the closure of the industry would have increased the Government's budget deficit by 30 per cent. It was a false belief that Europeans would be freed from the web of state subsidies.

The Coalfield Communities Campaign sent me a good paper, which shows how low is the United Kingdom subsidy per tonne compared with other countries. The subsidy in Belgium is £15·47 per tonne; in France, £19·19; West Germany, £12·06; while in the United Kingdom it is £8·41 per tonne.

The Coalfield Communities Campaign posed a good question. It asked me whether this money would be saved by devastating coal field communities. The fallacy of the Commission paper was that miners who became unemployed would be absorbed into an expanding EEC economy. That contradicts the Commission's report of 1984-85, which said that a rate of growth above the present short-term trend of 2·5 per cent. would be necessary to improve substantially the unemployment situation in the EEC.

Some hon. Members will be aware of the fact that at the moment the EEC unemployment level is 15 million. Current Commission predictions of Community economic growth to the end of the 1990s of 2·6 per cent. are hardly sufficient to reduce current levels of unemployment never mind absorb another 500,000 if such coal plans are implemented.

So much for the argument that the social costs of unemployment are only short term. It is a patent nonsense. Any number of coalfield local authorities are still suffering from unemployment and the social, environmental and general economic effects of closures—I can name a few, such as Durham county, the south Wales valleys, Scotland, or west Barnsley in Yorkshire. The coal communities have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. I am advised that the Coalfield Communities Campaign has produced a figure of nearly 2 million unemployed.

I suppose that we shall want to test the framework of the qualified continuation of state aids suggested in the proposals. We must question and challenge whether it could remove some of the genuine concerns expressed throughout the community vis-a-vis the originally proposed regulations. As the Minister hinted, we need to amend the way that we test such proposals.

We should welcome the late conversion of the Commission to the theory that state aid is indispensable, especially for producing the volume of coal required in the Community to maintain the impetus for a reduction of import dependency. However, we must criticise the absence of state aids for the extension of the market for coal, both in industry and in electricity utilities.

Tonight, the House will want to express further concern that the document and arrangements for state aid relate to two basic assumptions that are challengeable. First, when it refers to competitively produced coal and pricing levels, there is an assumption that the accountancy methods of each of the coal industries are comparable and that the final selling price of coal is based on the same component parts of the accounts. Normal depreciation and normal rates of interest may vary considerably between industries, as does accountancy for tax, subsidence costs and so on. It is illogical that a major part of the EC budget, where there is comparative cost accountancy, is devoted to the common agricultural policy. But that principle does not seem to be relevant to our industries.

The Commission, in a reference to state aids and other proposals on energy requirements, assumes that all coal imports in the Community are fairly priced for production and transportation costs, although it has agreed to examine import prices. Tonight it must be reinforced that more than 50 per cent. of coal imports to the Community are categorically unfairly priced. According to the Commission's statistics, during the first six months of 1985, 31 per cent. of imported coal came from South Africa and 14 per cent. from Poland. Polish coal is subsidised so that Poland earns foreign currency. The apartheid system in South Africa ensures low wage costs, which, together with coal for oil swaps, means that South African coal is unfairly priced.

The present deliveries of Colombian coal do not provide the Colombian Government with royalties. Because of a generous system of tax concessions Exxon can sell Colombian coal as a loss leader to secure a future market. Foreign coal is being dumped on European markets. The European Commission usually takes strong retaliatory anti-dumping measures when other products are being dumped, for example Japanese typewriters or Brazilian shovels. This dumped artificially cheap foreign coal is being used to denigrate the European coal industry. When foreign coal is dumped below cost, it is being subsidised.

We often hear the phrase "security of supplies". The Commission knows that it strikes a chord of anxiety after the events of the 1970s when the oil price quadrupled. For coal it originally meant marginal coal imports to supplement domestic production. The Commission embellished that, and redefined it to mean the availability of cheap coal from external sources. While domestic producers and trade unions argued for the necessary support measures, the Commission, in a piece of skulduggery, was involved in negotiations about contractual supplies with Colombia, Australia, the United States of America and Canada.

I said that I intended to speak briefly, and I shall fulfil that promise. The House could give a guarded welcome to the continuation of state aids, and the Minister's assurance that Brussels will not dictate to our indigenous coal industry. But we must express anxiety about the lack of detail regarding application.

10.44 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I should like to endorse the sense of pride expressed by hon. Members at the remarkable efforts of the coal industry in the past few months in achieving a considerable expansion in productivity. This shows the prizes that are available for the industry if we follow sensible policies that secure the industry's future on a sound and profitable basis. It is especially important that we have the power to decide the shape of that future in Britain.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman explain that point a little further? Might it not also be the case that the reason for the major increase in output per man is the massive job losses in the past two years?

Mr. Batiste: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to develop that point. I do not believe that that is true. There is a new sense of realism in the coal industry.

[Mr. Batiste]

Those who work in the industry know that their future depends on the industry being profitable. They are co-operating and working towards that end.

It is important that we maintain the progress that has been made and that the fundamental decisions about the industry's shape are made in Britain. In so far as the European regime enables us to continue along the lines that we wish to follow, so be it—I see no objection to endorsing a European regime. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have been very robust in fighting for British interests. I would happily accept their assurances.

There is, however, one matter on which I seek special assurance. Under the proposed changes, in category (a) aids will be allowable for solving social and regional problems but in category (b) aids will be eliminated in relation to recruitment. Only a few weeks ago, in the Upper Waiting Hall, NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. put on a remarkable display showing the success it has had in creating jobs in mining areas. The company's job creation record is one of the most successful I can recall. About 500 new jobs a month have been created at a lower cost than initially any other scheme.

Mr. Alec Woodall (Hemsworth): Where?

Mr. Batiste: If the hon. Gentlman had attended the exhibition and looked at the records, he would have seen a full list showing where jobs have been created. I am sure that the House would like to know that there were scarcely any Labour Members present at that exhibition while virtually all Conservative Members with mining constituencies were present. Perhaps the affairs of the mining industry would improve a great deal if the Opposition talked a little less about unemployment and more about job creation and took practical measures that are needed to help their regional problems.

A number of my colleagues and I are taking active steps in our constituencies to ensure that local industry and commerce are made fully aware of what NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. can offer. This weekend, I shall hold a seminar in my constituency on that subject. I seek the clearest of assurances from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that the new regime in Europe will in no way interfere with the undertaking he gave last year in Committee on the Coal Industry Bill. I asked him whether NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. would have all the money that it could usefully use to create jobs in mining areas. My hon. Friend readily gave that assurance. I hope that, before we vote, he will repeat it and assure us that the proposed regime will in no way change that.

10.49 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The Minister has spoken of the overall aim of the British coal industry and of the industries throughout the EEC. I hope that he will be more specific and tell us of the likely effect on our coal industry of the minor changes that have been made to the cyclical and strategic stocks of coal and to recruitment. What effect are these changes likely to have on the industry over the next few years?

I assume that the Minister is in contact with the Secretary of State for Energy by some means, and, although the Minister responded to the written question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason), I should like to know exactly what was meant by the following:

> "The proposed new Community energy objectives have been discussed twice by the Council of Energy Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has argued that the new objectives should be seen as markers, not as prescriptive targets." — [*Official Report*, 3 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. *11*.]

If there were any major problems in the British industry, would the industry ignore what the Council of Energy Ministers has been saying in Brussels?

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) referred to the meetings that have taken place in Europe in connection with the document that is before us. What was discussed in April 1985 which resulted in leaks to the effect that our industry was to lose about 50 per cent. of state aid along with other mining industries in the EEC? What was on the table and how did we arrive at the present position?

If we are to discuss the coal mining industry logically, we must understand how our European colleagues were sizing it up and how they regarded its future. It is clear that it will be dominated by the British coalfield for many years to come.

Under the heading "General Objectives", article 2 states:

> "Aids granted to the coal industry may be considered compatible with the Common market provided that they contribute to—
>
> improving the competitivity of the coal industry by optimising the productive capacity in order to adapt production to the conditions prevailing on the energy market;
>
> opening new economically viable capacities".

The opening of a coalfield takes place within a massive time scale that extends into five, 10 or even 15 years, depending on where the field is situated. How can world markets be assessed to determine whether we should opt for new capacity? There is a surplus of world energy because of a lengthy recession. Against that background, I should like to know how we can assess what will be economically viable five years hence, or even further into the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian talked about the dumping of coal and directed his remarks to Colombia and America, which are dumping coal into the European market. That is being encouraged, in a way, by the reduction in shipping costs. The cost of shipping fuel to Britain from America is one third of what it was in 1980. We know what is happening in South Africa and we are aware of the political turbulence in that country. The United Nations and the Commonwealth — we are members of both organisations—have condemned the vicious way in which coal is extracted from the South African mines. The mine operators use contract labour from neighbouring countries and those who mine the coal are kept in compounds during their 12 or 18-month contracts before they return to their homelands and families.

When discussing economic viability, we must recognise that the European coalfields generally do not always reflect the standards and living conditions of those in other countries whose industries are sending their coal to Europe. It is nonsense to talk about planning economic viability for the European coal industry in the present circumstances.

Article 4, under the heading "Sales side", states:

"Aids for supplying coal to specific markets may be considered compatible with the Common market, provided that they do not exceed, for each individual coal region or undertaking, the difference between forseeable average costs per tonne of coal produced and the comparable price of coal from non-member countries."

That is directed to supplying specific markets with British coal. For years, all the British coal industry unions have been arguing for the expansion of production of anthracite coal in south Wales. The present chairman of the NCB has said that in his opinion the Margam project, if it were seen through, would lead to the production of anthracite and would, to use his description, be a gold mine. We are still waiting to see whether Margam and south Wales anthracite will be produced in the quantities needed. Instead, we are sneaking anthracite into this country through the iron curtain from Poland. I invite the Minister to tell us by how much anthracite coal is being subsidised in Poland before it is brought on to the European market, especially as south Wales miners have been wanting the Margam project to go ahead for so long.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Is my hon. Friend aware that the then director of the south Wales coalfield, Mr. Philip Weekes, and Mr. Ian MacGregor met a group of Welsh Members during the coal strike and gave a complete commitment to the development of the Margam new mine and then used it as a form of publicity to weaken the morale of south Wales miners during the coal strike? They were and are still lies. The director and Ian MacGregor have reneged on their statements since the end of the strike.

Mr. Barron: It can certainly be said that the morale of the south Wales miners is low at present because of broken promises in relation to Margam. I hope that in his brief winding-up the Minister will say exactly when the Margam project will begin and when anthracite will come out of south Wales on to the market. I have used anthracite for many years, but I have heard that people who buy coal-fired boilers for domestic use are now being dissuaded from using anthracite. We want to know why we are not using anthracite when it can be mined in European coalfields.

In article 8 of the document we have the question of inhibited liabilities. The Minister will know that, sadly, last week the Horden colliery appeal was turned down under the terms of the new machinery which has been set up since the end of the coal strike. That is a great pity. I do not know all the details of the Horden colliery appeal, but I know that it suffers greatly, as does any colliery close to it, because it is on the north-east coast. It suffers from the cost of keeping it pumped free of water when it is closed. I wonder whether the National Coal Board looked at that question during the appeal. I wonder whether the NCB recognised those liabilities and the fact that, even when producing, it could be given permission to give aid to coalfields that needed it.

I would particularly like the Minister to spend some time on article 9, which states:

"All Member States which intend to grant aid to coal undertakings in 1986 shall, by September 1986, provide the Commission with:

(i) a statement of intentions and objectives for the industry for the period 1987-1990".

In his opening speech the Minister said that he would like us to congratulate British miners on the record levels of output in recent months. I shall certainly do that. I was lucky to work in a good coal mine. There was a good investment in the mine, which has been a major precursor to profitable pits. As a consequence, it was always in a position to achieve targets of over 3 tonnes per man shift. I, and I am sure all hon. Members, thank the British coal miners for their achievements, although that is not unusual. Given the right conditions and investment, they have done that for many generations—certainly while my family has been involved.

Does the Minister intend to tell the trade unions about the Government's objectives for the coal industry between 1987 and 1990? They will be bleak years. The redundancy payments scheme has been extended, but it will end in 1986-87. Nobody who works in the coal industry knows what the future holds for the collieries. They can make guesses, but they will not know, even next year, what is to happen to their collieries because there has been so much confusion in the industry since the ending of the strike. This information will be sent to Europe, so we ought to be debating it and those who work in the industry ought to know about it as well.

Article 9 contains many details. I should like the Minister to comment on (2)*(f)*. That refers to the available information on proposed closures of pits and to the re-employment of redundant mine workers on regional development programmes. The hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) referred to National Coal Board (Enterprise) Ltd. and said that it is creating 500 jobs a month. If so, it is remarkable. National Coal Board (Enterprise) Ltd. was formed a few months after the strike in 1984. It can be described only as a knee-jerk reaction by this Government. They were embarrassed by the economic arguments that lay behind that strike. They had been told for a very long time that even without the closure of more pits, there was already a very high level of unemployment. That resulted in this knee-jerk reaction. Nobody can say that NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. has been providing 500 jobs a month since July or August 1984. It may have been doing so during the last few months; I do not have the figures. I do not decry NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. I hope that it will go from strength to strength and that the money that it needs will be provided, but it is coming nowhere near to getting rid of the problems that have been created by the loss of jobs in British coalfields in the last two years.

Article 10 states:

"In assessing the measures and programmes submitted to it in connection with the closure of particularly loss-making pits the Commission shall take account of the special situation of individual coalfields or Member States."

What criteria are used in Europe when these assessments are made?

Hon. Members who represent coal mining constituencies where there is terrible unemployment want to know whether the decisions are taken in this country or in Europe and what criteria are used. The Minister referred to job losses in France and the lack of investment there, but he forgot to mention the massive job losses in British coalfields during the past two years. Over 50,000 miners have left the British coal mining industry in the past two years. It has created massive unemployment in mining constituencies. Job opportunities for young people are lacking. If the Minister is to refer to what is happening in the British coal mining industry, he ought to be prepared to be as open about it as he was about France.

11.4 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): This is to be only a short debate. Therefore, I shall confine my remarks to only a few matters. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) referred to the European subsidies and mentioned that the Belgian subsidy is the highest. He also mentioned the figures for France, West Germany and the United Kingdom. We should get the figures in proportion. Belgium, which has the highest subsidy, has the lowest production, 6·3 million tonnes. In France, where the subsidy is £19·19 per tonne, production in 1985 was 15 million tonnes. The Minister has rightly indicated that it will fall to 10 million tonnes. In Western Germany, where the subsidy is £12·06 per tonne, production last year was 88·4 million tonnes; that is still falling with the closure of uneconomic pits. In the United Kingdom the subsidy is £8·41 per tonne, but production is likely to be 91 million tonnes in 1985. When one is dealing with subsidies, it is important to get the whole thing in the right proportion.

I accept that subsidies have to be reduced, but now is not the time to do it because the coal industry could not stand it. When we were discussing the Coal Industry Bill in 1981-82, the Government said that viability would be achieved in the coal industry in 1983-84. In 1983-84 we were told that viability would be achieved later now it is in 1987-88. I should like to believe that but I do not accept that it will happen.

Nobody has yet mentioned one of the greatest factors which may destroy the glorious opportunities for the coal industry—the fact that the price of oil is falling fast. Oil went up from $2 per barrel to $42 per barrel in Libya; then it started falling fast. Many of us indicated only a year ago that the price was on the way down. I have always forecast that it would be well below $20 per barrel. If it falls to $15 per barrel, not only will oil interests be concerned——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I am following the hon. Gentleman. He is stretching the limits of the debate a little far and is turning it more into a debate on oil. I hope he will get back to the subject of coal.

Sir Trevor Skeet: I shall come back to the subject. When fuel oil becomes competitive with coal there will be difficulties.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose*——

Sir Trevor Skeet: I want to finish quickly because other hon. Members want to speak.

When the price of oil comes down to $18 per barrel it will be competitive with coal. Some of the coal-fired power stations will be in difficulty because the oil-fired power stations will be viable and will be in operation once again. The coal industry has been unsuccessful only because it has been unlucky over the years.

Mr. McKay *rose*——

Sir Trevor Skeet: I prefer not to give way. This is a short debate and some of my hon. Friends want the opportunity to speak.

We shall have to watch the oil price carefully to ensure that the coal industry is safe. On that point alone I recommend that the subsidy system in the United Kingdom must be maintained to ensure that we have a viable industry.

May I compliment the Government on having been successful in bringing to an end the miners' strike? The strike lasted far too long and cost the country over £5 billion which could have been spent on the diversification of industry and other things. On 20 December the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State indicated in a written answer that 23 collieries had closed since the end of the strike. Have any more closed since that date? That was the right course to take to improve the prospects for coal. Coal production costs are now going down and at the same time the output per man shift is going up. Congratulations to all the miners involved. Surely the Government's policy must be right. Develop the Vales of Belvoir, the Selbys and the long-life pits; have more of those and we will gradually become competitive internationally.

It is extraordinary how the jackals all come in for the kill. I would like to debate the issue at some length, but there is no time. We must have a realistic attitude towards imports. Most European countries inside the Community import coal. Germany has a subsidy system which will be maintained. We have not been importing coal from abroad, even though we have the right to do so. But it is wrong to say that it is subsidised in all countries. There are different forms of mining. It is open-cast in the United States; open-cast in South Africa; open-cast and deep-mined in Australia. They can push it on to the international market, as has been said. The low freight rates can cause difficulties competing.

I have maintained the utmost brevity, but I say in conclusion that it is for those reasons that we would put in jeopardy the progress made by the United Kingdom if we did not maintain a subsidy system in Western Europe to maintain not merely their coal industry but also ours in Britain.

11.11 pm

Mr. Alec Woodall (Hemsworth): I apologise for missing the Minister's opening remarks because I want to put a question to him which he may already have answered. Why is it that the consultative document from the EC was signed on 2 October last year and his explanatory memorandum on that document was signed and issued by him on 24 October last year but it has taken us until 5 February 1986 before we start to discuss the documents and their implications? I ask that question rather pointedly because last December I received a letter of one paragraph from the area director of North Yorkshire informing me that he saw no justification whatever for keeping open Kinsley Drift mine.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) has just mentioned Selby, the Vale of Belvoir and all the new capacity. Is he aware that Kinsley Drift mine was commissioned only on 19 August 1979? It is one of the newest pits in Yorkshire and cost £26 million. The area director said only last December that he could see no justification for keeping it open and was therefore recommending its closure. That pit has 12½ million tonnes of reserves of good quality coal, yet it has got to go, along with 350 jobs.

I want to draw attention to the first two main proposed changes in the explanatory memorandum. They are:

"(a) Aids to be allowable only for improving productivity, providing new economically viable capacity and for solving social and regional policies.

(b) Elimination of certain existing types of aid, for recruitment and coal stocks."

What recruitment? As my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has just said, we represent the areas with the highest unemployment in Yorkshire and Humberside. Since the strike ended, there has been no recruitment in the coal industry. Pits have been closed right, left and centre. All the young miners with little service who could not benefit from the redundancy payments schemes have been transferred to other mines which are supposed to be more profitable and to have better capacity. There has been no recruitment, so to talk about phasing out the aid for recruitment is nonsense.

Will the Minister comment on the aid for coal stocks? If all the aid that will be available after 1 July is devoted to improving productivity and providing new, economically viable capacity, productivity will be improved. The hon. Gentleman has paid tribute to the improved output per man shift since the end of the strike. More coal will be produced more quickly and more cheaply. If it cannot be sold, there will be no more aid to help to stock it. In the end, that will mean the closure of more pits, such as Kinsley Drift. That is almost a brand new pit, only six and a half years old, which has to go. The whole thing is nonsense.

I apologise for using rough language, but if Lord Hailsham, who presides in the other place, were listening to the debate, he would be saying under his breath "Bollocks", because that is what it amounts to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I believe that on reflection the hon. Member would prefer to withdraw that word. He may choose to substitute another word.

Mr. Woodall: I offer to withdraw the remark out of deference to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I was repeating only what the noble Lord said. It was in the press. He was replying under his breath to the bishops who sit on his right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member must not comment on what goes on in the other place. In this House we are responsible for our own conduct. The hon. Member has shown his willingness to withdraw. I hope that he will make that clear and will proceed with the rest of his speech.

Mr. Woodall: I apologised before I referred to what the noble Lord said in the other place. I unreservedly withdraw the remark.

The comparison between what is stated in the document and what the coal industry needs shows that the industry can have aid to produce coal more cheaply, but the more that is produced, the quicker the pits next door will be closed.

Mr. David Hunt: It may assist hon. Members, especially the hon. Gentleman, if I remind them that I made clear in my opening remarks that the proposed changes to cyclical stocks and recruitment will have no bearing on practices in the United Kingdom, because we have not previously granted aid in those areas.

Mr. Woodall: The hon. Gentleman has signed the explanatory memorandum to the consultative document. In relation to ministerial responsibility and policy implications, that shows that he has no other observations and that he accepts the consultative document. As I have explained by referring to paragraphs *(a)* and *(b)*, aid can be given to improve productivity and capacity, but the more coal that is produced and the more stocks that are built up, the quicker other pits which are viable at present will be closed.

In reply to the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), I should say that no aid has come to my area from NCB (Enterprise) Ltd—not one job has been created by it. The enterprise scheme will help only those who are prepared to invest their own capital. It is not forthcoming in our area. Representatives of the scheme have visited local councillors in my area to explain what they will do for the area, but until now no jobs have been created.

Mr. Batiste: If the hon. Gentleman tried a little harder to bring projects to the attention of NCB (Enterprise) Ltd., he might have better luck in creating jobs in his constituency.

Mr. Woodall: How many jobs has the hon. Gentleman created, through NCB (Enterprise) Ltd., in his area? How many have you created? Not one, and you cannot deny it——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that he must address other hon. Members in the third person. References to "you" are, of course, references to me; and I am not involved in this.

Mr. Woodall: I beg your pardon again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You and I have known each other for a long time, and remembering your track record of naming Members, I have no wish to arouse your anger in any way.

I put these points seriously to the Minister. It is nonsense to say that this document will help the coal industry. Aid will be provided after 1 July only to improve productivity and capacity, which will mean that much older pits in my area will get the chop. If the board can close six-and-a-half-year-old pits, God help the pits that are more than 100 years old.

11.21 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): This debate is not wholly about the state of the United Kingdom coal industry. If it was, no one could have put the case for the industry with greater accuracy or eloquence than my hon. Friends the Members for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) and Mid-Bedfordshire (Sir T. Skeet). The debate is also about the Community draft rules.

The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) said that he was surprised not to receive a brief from the National Coal Board. Conservative Members would have been more surprised if he had received the brief and paid any attention to it, because he has not done so during the past year or so. He also said that the document recognised that state aids across the Community are indispensable, I have read the document a couple of times, and I do not see that anywhere. Paragraph 4 of the Community's explanatory memorandum to the document says not that state aids are indispensable, but that rules to enable their continuation and to police them are indispensable. That is an important distinction.

The hon. Member for Midlothian said that, in view of the contents of the draft rules, the Opposition would not oppose them. I should tell my hon. Friends that, if the Opposition do not oppose the rules, we should at the least be slightly suspicious, because every time that the Opposition have not opposed an instrument or an act of

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

Government policy on the coal industry in recent months it has proved to be very expensive for the taxpayer and for my constituents, not to say his.

I had not intended to speak on this draft Community instrument. It is complex enough for hon. Members on both sides of the House to examine. As I implied in my question to my hon. Friend the Minister, the Government may be trying to have things both ways. There is an element of schizophrenia here. If productivity in the United Kingdom is improving, as he and my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet have seen and which I saw at Wistow colliery before Christmas, and if the NCB is on target for break-even in 1987-88—in which my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North cast such doubt—why are we threatened by the new proposals? Why did my hon. Friend the Minister say that the proposals are not new or sinister? Why does he say in his explanatory memorandum:

"If the Commission were to exercise without sensitivity their proposed powers to limit state aids which includes social measures, they would jeopardise the achievement of the NCB's primary objective which is to break even by 1987-88."

I hesitate to press my hon. Friend on that point. He is greatly experienced in European Community matters and has great knowledge of the industry. Only an Under-Secretary of State with his expertise and understanding could respond to that point. He is the best person to answer my question. We and the Opposition are joining to welcome the rules which he says worry him because there is a lack of defined criteria on which to police the state aids. However, why do the rules at the same time possibly jeopardise the board's objective of achieving break-even in 1987-88?

11.26 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Minister drew attention to the objective set out in the document which was to aim for a viable coal industry in Europe able to produce coal at world market prices. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) mentioned his anxiety about taking an oversimplistic view of the market. It is important that within the EEC regulations and in this country we take account of the fact that when considering the world coal market we are not comparing like with like.

Despite some of the comments by Conservative Members, the EEC coal industry is subject to competition from coal imported from South Africa, South America and Poland which is produced by methods and at rates of pay that would not be considered acceptable within the EEC.

We are taking a rather foolish and short-sighted view of the market if we impose regulations on reasonable working conditions within the EEC while being prepared to open our doors to coal which is produced under conditions which we regard as unacceptable, and undermines our market. That is a point that the EEC and the United Kingdom should be in mind.

The Minister also said that he looked forward to the coal industry breaking even in 1987-88. There are hon. Members on both sides of the House who would like to see the coal industry break even in the right circumstances. It depends on how that is achieved. It depends on whether it is achieved by increased output, increased marketing and selling more coal and, as a result, one hopes, creating more employment and investment, or whether it is achieved by cutting the industry to the bone, eliminating everything on the margins and ignoring all the social consequences and costs. That is the kind of exercise that we are witnessing in the steel industry, which threatens to have devastating consequences for the economy of Scotland and the fortunes of the Conservative party in Scotland.

The coal strike has been referred to. I would like to think that the House could look forward rather than back. We have got over the strike and must now find a way in which to advance the industry. The decision whether to keep mines open must be based on slightly wider criteria than have been accepted by the Government. I speak as an economist. To say, within the narrow accounting confines of the NCB, that a pit is uneconomic and should be closed is foolish if two consideration are not borne in mind. The first is whether there is alternative employment which gives people a viable living and takes them off the public purse. The second is whether the uneconomic nature of the pit is due to long or short-term factors.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) touched on the question of the oil price. If, as some people fear, the oil price collapses in the next few months, it would present considerable difficulties for the coal industry. We would be faced with a difficult problem—whether that was a short or long-term development. It is conceivable that the price of oil could fall by $3, $4 or $10, a barrel. It is also conceivable that it might recover, depending on whether OPEC disintegrates or regroups. All of these things are uncertain.

It would be foolhardy to say that we have an uneconomic coal industry because the price of oil, which is sustained by a cartel, has fallen and that we shall close pits wholesale without taking account of the long-term implications. That is why we need a coherent and flexible energy policy. The absence of such a policy has been my consistent and major criticism of the Government. We must determine the parameters within which we want to operate, for coal, oil, gas and electricity. It is not good enough for the Government to sit back and say that they will allow the market to determine price, that they accept no resposibility for the market, irrespective of whether it is manipulated by cartels, multinationals or what I would call slave labour in Third world countries. We have a right and a duty to take account of such factors.

The document does not preclude our taking note of such factors. It says that solving social and regional problems will remain matters in which Government intervention is allowed. I have identified the areas in which there should be intervention. The Government should do more in that respect. I hope that our taking note of the document will not be used as an excuse to reduce such activity.

The hon. Member for Midlothian said that he had not had a brief from the National Coal Board. I agree that none of us has had a brief, but I tried to get some information today and, at the end of the afternoon, got a telephone call to the effect that there is nothing significant in the document, so the NCB does not have a view. It was not terribly anxious to elaborate. That is not very helpful. I should have thought that a Member of Parliament seeking information might have been given a rather more full explanation. I was genuinely grateful for the Minister's opening speech, as I needed some guidance about the background. I realise that we are taking note of a developing policy, within which we can sensibly operate.

I strongly believe that the House should start to look forward. We should try to find common ground and recognise some of the wider issues. This sterile confrontation cannot continue. The Minister is committed to that objective, I know. To the extent that he acts accordingly, I shall support him. I reserve the right, however, to take issue with him when I think that he falls short of that objective.

11.35 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I regret that I have only a minute or two to say what I want to say.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). I come from an area where there has been a considerable rundown of mining capacity. Miners in my area remember that most of the mines were closed when the Labour party was in power. Those miners received neither redundancy money nor, in many cases, concessionary coal.

The current rundown of mines has led to problems in my area. However, at least there are now substantial redundancy payments. We also have NCB (Enterprise) Limited. People in my area, with the help of NCB (Enterprise) Limited, have gone out and sold the area. We have achieved a number of additional jobs for those miners who had lost their jobs.

I exhort each hon. Member to go out and sell his area and to get hold of NCB (Enterprise) Limited. They should try to organise a seminar and explain to those in need of jobs when mines close that there are great opportunities for them. I have said time and time again that the important thing is to think positively, not negatively.

11.36 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Secretary of State said this week that he had been staggered by the success of the industry. We have not been staggered—we have been telling him for months that the consequence of the closure of high-cost capacity would be a substantial economic improvement—but achieved at very high cost both to the community and in loss of reserves. The Government must respond to that success by insisting upon substantial progress with the expansion of coal into the industrial market. However, it is to the European market that I wish to address my remarks.

The NCB has almost a 50 per cent. stake in the shareholding of the British Fuel Company. I hope that the Minister is listening. That company has a 46 per cent. holding in Inter Continental Fuels. In turn, that has a 15 per cent. shareholding in the Coal Trading Corporation Group. That group is actually controlled by two French public companies — Charbonnages de France and Association Technique de l'Importation Charbonniere— *[Interruption.]* The point is serious, although the title may be amusing.

The point to which the Minister must address himself is that those two companies are part of the French public sector, now increasingly engaged in the importation of South African coal and trading it in France and the Mediterranean. I accept that President Mitterrand is of the same political persuasion as me. He maintains that he is leading the fight against apartheid. The Minister must go to Europe and insist that our successful coal industry obtains the share to which it is entitled inside the Common Market. If that means an assault on President Mitterrand to ensure that he fulfils his promise to lead the fight against apartheid, so be it. The Minister knows that the Government, with a firm attitude, can secure a larger share of the European market. The success of the industry during the past six months demonstrates the case.

It is about time that the NCB once again returned to a rather higher priority for training and recruitment, which have not received the attention that they deserve. Perhaps the Minister will think on that.

11.38 pm

Mr. Eadie: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall be brief. The contribution of the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) was a good example of why the Government are in trouble. He either cannot hear or he cannot read. How could he suggest that there is something clandestine about an Opposition spokesman saying that he had spoken to the Secretary of State for Energy who had confirmed that he would uphold the United Kingdom's position at the Energy Ministers' Council and that a British Parliament would be able to decide on the future of the coal industry? If there is anything clandestine or suspicious about that, there is little hope for us. We shall have Yahoo politics.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) said that he was in favour of maintaining coal subsidies. I hope that we shall not be frightened off by the changing oil situation. It could be said that the coal industry is lucky and that the oil prices are coming down, but that will have consequences not for the coal industry but for the oil industry. It means that the marginal oil fields will no longer be developed, and that the off-shore oil industry will be devastated.

The House has given the Minister a fair wind and told him what he should do at Brussels. We welcome what he said earlier. He has an easy job in responding to the debate. We want to make sure that the United Kingdom decisions are taken in the British Parliament and not decided by Brussels bureaucrats.

11.42 pm

Mr. David Hunt: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate has been comprehensive and has covered a range of issues. Hon. Members' points have been of great value in preparing for the detailed negotiations that stretch ahead of us in Brussels before we can sign the final decision. I hope that the hon. Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), for Hemsworth (Mr. Woodall), for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and my hon. Friends the Members for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) will excuse me if I do not reply to all of the questions that have been posed, in view of the time restraint. I want to get in as many contributions as possible, so I shall write to all concerned if I am not able to cover their points.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) for dealing with these issues in his characteristically committed way, as he so ably stewarded much of the operation of the existing state aids regime in its early days. No one knows better than he the way with which these matters have to be dealt. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington must take account of the fact that the direction

[Mr. David Hunt]

about which we are talking covers not only deficit but social grants. He will find the answer to his question among the social costs.

The hon. Member for Midlothian, and others, said how proud they were of the achievements of those who work in the coal industry, and there are many reasons why the future of our coal industry has every prospect of being the brightest in Europe. We have the greatest coal reserves in Europe, the best and finest mining engineers, the benefit of world-class British mining equipment and manufacturers, and, with new productivity records being set from Scotland to Kent and from south Wales to the midlands, British miners are demonstrating beyond all reasonable doubt that they are the best in the world. What a transformation we have seen. Output per man shift under the Labour Government, sadly, moved down from 2·29 tonnes in 1974-75 to 2·24 tonnes in 1978-79. The latest available figure is 3·02 tonnes. That means that all the improvement in productivity over the past 12 years has taken place since this Government came to power, and the figure is still rising.

Hon. Members should be in no doubt that at the Energy Council on 20 March, the United Kingdom will continue to resist any inappropriate intervention by Brussels in our coal industry, because the objective for the NCB is to develop an outstanding and economically viable industry that can compete in the world energy market. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North was right to point to the uncertainties that lie ahead, but the board is on target to reach its objective by 1987-88. To achieve that, aids will continue to be necessary. Therefore, it is essential that a realistic and sympathetic system of support should emerge from our negotiation in Brussels to allow progress to continue without any fear of violation of our treaty commitments. We shall continue to press for this. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9316/85, and supports the Government's intention to ensure that the new rules governing state aids for the coal industry should continue to take full account of the United Kingdom's objective of achieving a smooth transition to a sound and viable industry.

West Glamorgan (Economic Situation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

11.44 pm

Mr. Donald Coleman (Neath): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of the House and of the Government to the worsening economic situation in west Glamorgan. It is giving increasing anxiety both to those who live in the county and to those who represent it nationally and locally. I hope to put on record some of the worries being expressed about the west Glamorgan economy. Having done so, I hope that the Government will be galvanised into action to produce solutions to our problems.

I remind the House of the industrial importance of west Glamorgan which is underlined by the companies and corporations identified with it. They include the British Steel Corporation, the National Coal Board, British Petroleum Oil, British Petroleum Chemicals, British Aluminium, the Metal Box Company, the Ford Motor Company, and Cam Gears, all of which have national and international reputations. In 1979, when the Prime Minister formed her first Administration, they employed thousands of people in the county. Today, the position of those industrial giants is dramatically different. They have drastically cut their work forces. Instead of employing thousands, in most cases they employ only hundreds while some have closed altogether.

Before 1979 my parliamentary colleagues in west Glamorgan and I could take consolation from the fact that there was security of employment for our people with those employers, while redundancies were taking place in less substantial industrial undertakings and unemployment was rising. The fear of massive unemployment that exists in the county today did not enter into our thinking then. Unfortunately, today we do not have such a comforting position. All too often we hear of cuts and closures resulting in redundancies and miseries.

To set our fears and anxieties in perspective, I shall quote from a letter written to the county's Members of Parliament on behalf of the county council by Mr. Rush, the clerk of the council, and dated 14 January 1986. He writes:

"Without mentioning any confidential information and looking only at press reports, local industry is shown to be under great pressure with difficulty to keep employment levels static.

Since the beginning of October 1985 there have been reports of short time at Ford Motor Co., Metal Box (300 laid off until '86) and B.S.C. Port Talbot's two weeks break at Christmas. Redundancies have been announced at Morganite, INCO, Unit-Inspection, Roadline, and Lucas Electrical at Ystradgynlais. N.C.B. have closed their Aberpergwm mine (following N.C.B. Treforgan in July) and Addis have announced the closure of their Pforestfach factory. Also, the major redundancies of 750 at B.P. Llandarcy announced earlier in the year have still to take effect."

That letter shows clearly the gale of unemployment which is blowing through west Glamorgan. Those difficulties show that not one of the parliamentary constituencies is unaffected.

The county clerk also quoted the figures for benefit claimants for December 1985, issued by the Department of Employment. Male unemployment stood at 17,782 and female unemployment at 7,212, giving a total of 24,994. The recently published figures for January 1986 show that

the position has become worse, not better, with 19,418 male benefit claimants and 7,212 females, giving a total of 27,282.

In fairness, I should say that there have been some welcome developments, such as the further expansion of Slima Wales, which will employ 130 more people at its Ystalyfera factory in my constituency, and the rapid take-up of space at the factories of the Welsh Development Agency on the Baglan industrial park. There is also the useful work of the Neath development partnership and the west Glamorgan enterprise trust. Unfortunately, those successes will not go far towards balancing recent losses, and they are mostly projections of additional jobs over a three-year period.

As if to emphasise this "having to run to keep up with ourselves" in west Glamorgan, within days of our receiving the letter from the county council to which I referred there came the shattering announcement from the Metal Box Company that a huge cut in employment was to take place at the company's Neath factory, with some redundancies coming as early as April this year and the remainder occuring in the spring of 1987. The result will be that the factory which employed some 2,000 people in 1979 will be providing work for only some 500 people when this announced redundancy is completed. We are told that this redundancy is because of changes in technology, foreign competition and the fluctuations in the value of sterling. Nowhere is there any complaint about the behaviour of the work force. In fact, the company has always expressed itself happy at the co-operation that it has received in these difficult times from the workers at the factory.

I turn to an aspect of these redundancies and plant closures to which not enough attention is paid, especially by the Government—the loss of revenue to the local authorities when that action takes place. I believe that the Government should take greater account of the effect of factory closures on the local economies, especially in the case of west Glamorgan. I shall give a few examples of the loss of revenue to local authorities which show up their position.

The Lliw Valley borough council tells me that the number of non-domestic properties in the borough with a void rating was listed in September 1981 as 36,700. By 30 September 1985, there had been a dramatic increase to 162,000. Neath borough council has told me that in March 1985 at BP Llandarcy the rateable value was reduced from £622,850 to £531,300. The rundown in the refinery will mean a significant loss in rateable value which could fall to some £400,000 by 1 April 1986. The rateable value of Metal Box, which is at present £125,500, is likely to fall to £75,000 as a result of the company's contraction of its operations in Neath. There are other examples in Neath, but time does not allow me to quote them.

I ask the Under-Secretary of State to take on board this effect on the county's economy. We hear all too often from Conservative Members how rates deter investment, but what I have just said shows that closures seriously affect the revenues of local authorities. There is, therefore, a much closer identity of interest between local authorities and industry than the Conservative party cares to recognise.

I turn to a consideration of the Swansea enterprise zone and its effect on the economy of west Glamorgan. The enterprise zone is sited on a location that was once the metallurgical centre of the world, giving employment to thousands of people. It is to the credit of Swansea city council that it took the initiative to clear the dereliction of a past industrial era and convert it into a place of employment for today. That was the intention but, unfortunately, instead of becoming a new centre for manufacturing, it seems to be becoming a place where retail outlets and warehouses are established, neither of which gives any significant employment.

The effect of this is being felt by businesses in the Swansea city centre, the other local shopping centres in the city and the shopping centres in the surrounding boroughs. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) has confirmed to me that the enterprise zone is having an adverse effect on local shopping centres in his constituency. He has told me of the difficulties of businesses in Morriston. I have received complaints about the adverse effects of the zone upon businesses in Pontardawe and Neath.

It seems that the Government grants which are forthcoming for the enterprise zone are not producing the jobs that their huge investment should be bringing about. It comes as something of a surprise to find a hotel and a public house being built in an enterprise zone, but that is what is happening.

I ask the Minister to examine more closely what is happening in the enterprise zone. I ask him also to insist that real manufacturing jobs must be created in it and that the zone does not become the means of destroying the city and town centres in the county, thereby creating even more unemployment and economic problems. I shall digress for a moment to say that one thing that I can see flowing from the Government's Sunday trading Bill, if it becomes law, is the huge retail outlets in the enterprise zone becoming very rich while the town and city centre businesses close down, causing more and more unmployment.

What is demanded to put things right in west Glamorgan? There is general agreement in west Glamorgan that the entire county should be designated as a special development area so that we may have the grants and inducements that will bring the investment that is needed. The Government must understand that their legislation which created west Glamorgan brought together as a county localities which have always been dependent upon one another for employment.

Ministers have had it urged upon them time and time again by the Members who represent the county and by those in local government that west Glamorgan must have special development areas designation. I urge the Minister to understand that we see no other way in which we can revive the county's prosperity. West Glamorgan had thousands more jobs when inducements were available before 1979 than it has today under present policies. Clearly that is the proof of our case.

Communications are essential to any economy, and it is a vital factor to the communities of west Glamorgan. Perhaps the Minister will be able to help me by responding to my questions on three road schemes. First, can he tell me what progress has been made on the replacement of the stretch of the A365 trunk road between Glynneath and Aberdulais? We have waited a long time for the completion of this vital link between west Glamorgan and the midlands. Can the Minister say something about the stretch of the M4 from Baglan to Lon Las? What is the up-to-date position of the Swansea valley road between Pontardawe and Clydach?

[Mr. Donald Coleman]

There are rumours circulating that British Rail intends stopping the 125 Inter-city service at Cardiff and running feeder trains to the west. Such a proposition would be a disaster to west Glamorgan and I hope that the Minister will make it clear to British Rail that that is not acceptable. In any event, British Rail can be assured of the strongest resistance to such a proposal both inside and outside the House.

The economy of west Glamorgan is taking a severe shaking. It is the Government's duty to recognise that and to change their policy. They must put aside any pride about giving up failed policies. The people of west Glamorgan look for a change and they have a right to do so. I have put the case tonight as others have previously, and I hope on this occasion the Minister has listened and will act.

11.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Coleman) has highlighted the specific economic problems of west Glamorgan. I am glad of this opportunity to describe how the Government are tackling them.

I shall deal first with the recent announcement by Metal Box. Of course, like the hon. Gentleman, I know that the 421 redundancies to take place over the next 15 months will obviously be a blow to the area. At the end of the day those decisions are for the commercial judgement of the company, since it is only the company which is in a position to determine the future of the plant in the light of all the circumstances facing it. However, I can say that officials of our Industry Department have been and will remain in close touch with the company to help in any way they reasonably can; and the Manpower Services Commission will, of course, be standing by to offer its full range of services. I know that Metal Box is considering what it can do to help redundant workers and will be offering counselling and advice. I hope that the company will follow the excellent example set by British Petroleum which accepted its responsibilities to an area which had served it well in the past.

We are also here tonight to discuss the more general economic position of west Glamorgan. It is always easy to say that more should be spent and more should be done than is the case already. But the hon. Gentleman must also be aware that the Government have always seen their task as being to give assistance to attract real new jobs that offer each area a sustained and long-term future, to invest in worthwhile training programmes which help to meet industry's needs and at the same time to contain inflation as well as encourage investment and profitability. We must therefore look at west Glamorgan in relation to what we are doing on some of those points.

Let us look first at the assistance available to industry. As a result of the Government's comprehensive review of regional industrial policy in 1984, the whole of the county of west Glamorgan remains eligible for support. The area of greatest need within the county—the Neath and Port Talbot travel-to-work area — is a development area which has the maximum priority for regional assistance. The Swansea travel-to-work area has intermediate area status and is eligible for regional selective assistance; the whole area also enjoys the advantages of access provided by the M4 and benefits from the activities of the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board and the Manpower Services Commission.

I know that the county council and the hon. Member for Neath are pressing that the whole of the west Glamorgan area be given development area status. A key element in the new system is that it is comprehensive and coherent—that is to say, a change in one area cannot be made without repercussions for others. Any change in west Glamorgan could, therefore, have knock-on effects elsewhere in Great Britain which could seriously undermine the balance and effectiveness of the policy as a whole. It is still too early to judge precisely how well the new system is working, but we shall consider carefully the possible need for any future changes which may appear necessary.

Projects currently being undertaken by companies in the county and for which offers of regional selective assistance have been accepted since 1 January 1984, forecast the creation of nearly 1,800 new jobs and safeguard 2,271 existing jobs. The projects involved include those being undertaken by Corgi Toys, Diversified Products, Spontex, Manoradd and by the Slimma Group mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman may also be aware of the new investment being undertaken by Borg-Warner Ltd. and David S. Smith Ltd. which will strengthen their respective undertakings in the county. In addition, during last year in the hon. Member's own constituency, new style regional development grants totalling some £485,000 and providing 169 jobs have been offered.

The WDA has been making its own contribution to the area. Since May 1979 85 advance factories have been completed in the county providing 608,000 sq ft of floorspace. Last year 22 agency factories were allocated to companies expecting to create over 600 new jobs. During 1985 there was considerable interest in the Baglan Industrial Park, as the hon. Gentleman said, and six advance factories were allocated to companies expecting to create 245 new jobs. The WDA's annual property review last autumn identified a need for further development at Baglan and the agency's plan for additional factory building in 1986-87 will be announced at the same time as its budget is published in the Supply Estimates. The agency has also made a tremendous contribution to the reclamation of derelict land in the area. It is also encouraging new and high technology. It is collaborating with University College, Swansea, in the development of the innovation centre on the Singleton campus. This initiative has the potential to do much to help generate high technology development in the area.

The Government are often attacked on the ground that they do not give adequate weight to worth while capital schemes and public sector investment. This is not so. In Wales, since 1979, there have been high levels of investment in factory building. Over £300 million has been spent by the various agencies — through hospital construction, worth £250 million since 1979, to road building, worth over £600 million since the same year. This argument can carry no weight in west Glamorgan, either. With local authority expenditure, the combined capital spending by the four districts and west Glamorgan county council is budgeted in 1985-86 at about £62 million, about £16 million more than in 1984-85 and £28 million more than in 1981-82. Capital spending since 1981-82 has therefore comfortably outstripped the rise in

inflation and the average increase for Wales as a whole. In the same period the position in Neath is that gross capital spending is forecast for this financial year to be 154 per cent. greater than the amount spent in 1981-82.

For the forthcoming year capital allocations to local authorities in Wales were increased by £60 million, 23 per cent. more than authorities received for the current year. Within this increase west Glamorgan's share of the total resources has also risen. The capital allocation for housing in the area has risen by 24 per cent. while overall allocations have increased by 25 per cent.

I would also like to mention the effect of next year's rate support grant settlement on the authorities in the county area. The settlement is a good one for Wales, and particularly good for west Glamorgan. Overall increases in provision and grant exceed the forecast rate of inflation. If west Glamorgan county council increases its spending by 5 per cent. next year, which is in line with the settlement, then its rate precept need go up only by 2·1 per cent.—less than half the projected rate of inflation. In Neath the situation is even better. Rates could fall by as much as 8 per cent. I hope that both authorities will continue to budget as responsibly next year as they have done recently. They know the considerable benefits to industry and business that come in the wake of realistic rates.

There is often some misunderstanding over the effect of factory closures on loss of rates. Rate support grant is an equalisation grant. Broadly speaking, this means that losses in rateable value are compensated for by increases in block grant, so if a factory closes the authority should in normal circumstances, receive an increase in block grant as a result.

Within west Glamorgan, as the hon. Gentleman readily acknowledged, the importance of good road communications in assisting efforts to promote economic activity and improve job prospects is fully recognised and £25 million has been spent on improving the motorways and trunk roads in the county since 1979. The virtual completion of the M4 between the Severn bridge and Pont Abraham gives west Glamorgan direct access to the national motorway network. But we are keen to press ahead with two major road improvement schemes in west Glamorgan. Preparation work on the A465 Glyn Neath-Aberdulais improvement is already well in hand; subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and engineering design, we expect to have this £26 million scheme ready to start between 1988 and 1990. The other major scheme provisionally planned to start in this period is the Baglan-Lon Las section of the M4. If opportunity presents itself, some work on this £90 million project could be put in hand before 1988.

I must also draw attention to the importance of west Glamorgan county council's own road improvement programme. It already has £13 million worth of major projects under way, comprising the A483 north dock interchange in Swansea, the A484 Loughor bridge replacement and the A4067 Ynsforgan to Glais improvement. My Department has been glad to support these schemes by meeting 50 per cent. of their cost through transport supplementary grant. Moreover, we have also accepted for transport supplementary grant purposes a further two schemes with a combined cost of £12 million which are due to start in 1986-87. First, there is the section of the A4067 improvement between Glais and Pontardawe. Second, there is the Neath urban inner city bypass which forms an integral part of the Neath redevelopment scheme. Our commitment to the trunk road programme and our support for the county road programme should leave no one in doubt as to the importance we attach to providing a road infrastructure appropriate to the needs of west Glamorgan.

A further significant contribution to the employment opportunities in the county has been the successful development of the Swansea enterprise zone. The latest progress report indicates that between designation and June last year 137 firms have taken premises on the zone, bringing with them over 1,600 jobs, of which 750 were new ones. A further 154 jobs are expected to result from firm commitments to the zone. Although just over the border from the hon. Member's constituency, I have no doubt that many of his constituents have benefited from our contribution to the zone, which to date includes £7·5 million from urban programme and special capital allocations, plus a further £5·4 million as compensation for the rate revenue forgone from premises within the zone.

The hon. Gentleman and others have criticised the amount of retailing that is allowed in the zone. After listening to the arguments we agreed that the limit on the requirement for retail developments to seek planning consent should be reduced from 45,000 to 25,000 sq ft. The new limit was introduced only in April 1985 and the city council is currently assessing its effectiveness. We shall, of course, be prepared to consider evidence from the council on the adequacy of the present limit.

Assistance aimed specifically at preparing young people for work and supporting those looking for work is particularly important and is being directed through the various schemes run by the Manpower Services Commission. In that context I must mention the package of measures which is aimed directly at the problems facing long-term unemployed people, because the hon. Member's constituency has a special part to play in this.

The measures were announced in November and as part of them in pilot areas—which include the Neath and Port Talbot travel-to-work area—people who have been unemployed for more than one year can receive a "job-start" payment of £20 per week for six months if they accept a job at under £80 per week. This arrangement is backed by a programme of counselling interviews which could lead to the offer of a job, a place on the community programme, entry to the enterprise allowance scheme, a place on a relevant MSC training course or membership of a local job club. Although it is still early days, the first signs of the pilot study are encouraging.

Our contribution either to firms which want assistance to move to the area or to protect the jobs they have already created, or to individuals who are seeking work, can be successful only if there is a matching contribution from local communities, local authorities and from the private sector. In west Glamorgan, this contribution has been demonstrated by the energy of the local enterprise agency movement, by the success of the enterprise zone at Swansea, by urban programme schemes and by the partnership with the private sector through urban development grant projects.

The Government attach considerable importance to the promotion of small businesses and are now doing much to encourage their expansion as part of our overall policy of expanding economic growth. We believe——

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock on Wednesday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at fourteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

YORKSHIRE WATER AUTHORITY BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

ABERYSTWYTH HARBOUR BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL *(By Order)*

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

COUNTY OF SOUTH GLAMORGAN (TAFF CROSSING) BILL *(By Order)*

HARWICH PARKESTON QUAY BILL *(By Order)*

MILFORD HAVEN PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT BILL *(By Order)*

BEXLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

SHOREHAM PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (CITY EXTENSION) BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 13 February.

PETERHEAD HARBOURS (SOUTH BAY DEVELOPMENT) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration read.
To be considered upon Monday 10 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries Protection

1. **Dr. Godman** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement on the current level of United Kingdom fishery protection resources, in the light of the recent accession to the European Economic Community of Spain and Portugal.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): I am confident that the resources currently devoted to fisheries protection, which are deployed flexibly in response to enforcement needs, are adequate to meet the demands of the present situation following the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Community.

Dr. Godman: The operations of the fisheries protection service are to some extent determined or shaped by EEC regulations. When does the Minister expect the proposed expansion of the EEC inspectorate from 10 to 21 to take effect?

Mr. Gummer: That is a matter for the Commission, but people are being recruited for the posts. I am particularly pleased not only that that is going ahead under Britain's pressure, but, with the association between France, Britain and the Republic of Ireland, which together have been dealing most effectively with policing in the south-western approaches.

Mr. Harris: I am the hon. Member whose constituency is nearest to Spain. Will my right hon. Friend give my fishermen an absolute assurance that policing arrangements will be tightened with regard to Spanish fishing so that we can deal with the massive illegal fishing by Spain in the western approaches?

Mr. Gummer: We have already done a great deal to meet my hon. Friend's request. I was in the west country seeing how effective the arrangements were. I think he will agree that what we are doing has been effective. We arrested a boat in the first week, and that resulted in a heavy fine. I have no doubt that we shall make sure that the Spanish fishermen fish legally. I ask my hon. Friend to tell his fishermen that not only are we doing that, but that we have been surprised and pleased by the way in which the Spanish Government have sought to do that work.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Does the Minister acccept that there can be no faith in the common fisheries policy unless it is properly poiiced, and that the key responsibility falls on our Government in their fishery protection effort? Is there not a case for increasing that effort with the advent of a power whose fleet is as large as its reputation for observing the rules is small?

Mr. Gummer: I have made that point a number of times. The great and remarkable success of the common fisheries policy is largely because increasingly it is being enforced, and people know that to be so. When the hon. Gentleman sees the measures that we have taken on the south-western approaches, I feel that, on this occasion at least, he will be able to support the Government.

Mr. Hicks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in order to allay the anxieties that are being expressed by south-western fishermen, it is necessary for them to see action being taken and convictions being obtained?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why I went to see the way in which the policing is being carried out, and why I welcome the action being taken and the conviction that was obtained in the first week. I shall keep a close personal eye on seeing that this continues.

Mr. Wallace: There is now an added burden upon the fishery protection resources because of the accession of Spain and Portugal. Does the Minister believe that

sufficient resources are still available to maintain the former level of fishery protection in northern waters, particularly because of the phasing out of the the RAF Nimrod spotter plane?

Mr. Gummer: The purpose of phasing out the RAF Nimrod spotter plane is to replace it with a plane that will do the job much better. We wish to do it for no other reason. I am, therefore, satisfied. if I were not, I should be pressing for additional resources.

Mr. Randall: Is the Minister aware that many of the people in the industry are still not confident that the common fisheries policy is operating fairly? Will he put pressure on the Commission to provide feedback for the industry on how well enforcement is working?

Mr. Gummer: This country initiated the pressure. We are continuing to apply pressure and it is increasingly bearing fruit. If the hon. Gentleman wants proof, he must look at the very strong representations that have been made to other Fisheries Ministers by their fishermen now that we are being so very much tougher.

Milk

2. **Mr. Colin Shepherd** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had in the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community concerning the future of milk production within the Community.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): There have been no recent discussions in the Council of Ministers on the future of milk production within the Community. The Commission's proposals for a scheme to buy up and cancel milk quota have yet to be considered by the Council of Ministers. Other matters affecting milk production are likely to be discussed during the price fixing negotiations.

Mr. Shepherd: In respect of the proposed Community outgoers scheme, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Council of Ministers is fully cognisant of the real interests of both landlord and tenant and of the importance of reaching an agreement that is fair to both parties and that will reflect individual circumstances? Does he agree that it is probably better to take a little longer in arriving at a decision of this kind than to take one in haste, which might set unfortunate precedents for the future?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend knows that I am anxious to ensure that there is fairness between the varying interests of landlord and tenant with regard to milk quotas. I am having discussions at this moment, but I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend has told me.

Sir Peter Mills: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that in all the problems of milk production and surpluses it is important to be fair to the various countries? Will he look into the developing problem of New Zealand and its butter agency in this country? It is importing butter from Eire and blending it with its own. It is therefore fulfilling a much larger quota in this country. That is completely against the butter agreement and needs to be looked into.

Mr. Jopling: I am aware of my hon. Friend's suggestions and I am looking into them.

Mr. Home Robertson: We recognise the need for an extended outgoers scheme, but what has happened to the negotiations over the scheme? We understood that the scheme was to come into effect in January. Will the Minister assure us that he will try to get it right this time, with particular reference to the needs of tenants in this country, and with even more particular reference to the fact that Britain took an excessive cut in production under the original quota system?

Mr. Jopling: The Presidency of the Council of Agriculture Ministers has not yet brought this forward to the point of decision. It will now be embraced within the normal price fixing arrangements, which we shall begin to discuss at the end of this month.

Mr. Ashdown: If the Commission's proposals go ahead, will the Government respond to the almost unanimous view of the milk producing industry, which would require the Government to establish a fund from the quota which could be reallocated to hardship and new entrant cases? The Government have said in the past that they are broadly in favour of such a system. Will the Minister give an undertaking to put it into operation?

Mr. Jopling: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman means by "a fund". If he means a fund of money, that is one thing. What I need is a reserve of milk quota in order to be able to reallocate. If I want to get some milk quota to reallocate, I have to get it from somebody within this country who wishes to release it. That is much easier to say than to find.

Mr. Andy Stewart: In view of what my right hon. Friend said about a further 3 per cent. of milk producers taking a golden handshake and going out of milk production, has he considered, with the Commission, the fact that this will throw another 200,000 tonnes of beef on to the beef market and impose restrictions on that sector?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, I am aware of that. I think I am right in saying that the Community has proposed a 2 per cent. cut. An NFU delegation saw me this week and its members drew my attention to the great difficulty that would ensue for the beef sector if there were any cut in milk production.

Agricultural Land

3. **Mr. Cash** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in the light of current over-production, he will take steps to revise the current guidelines for the release, where appropriate, of some agricultural land for other purposes.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Peggy Fenner): The Government continue to attach importance to the protection of agricultural land as a valuable but finite national resource. The Government's policies in this area are implemented to ensure that the right balance is struck between the competing considerations.

Mr. Cash: I must express some disappointment with that answer. Will my hon. Friend tell me whether the 1976 guidelines are under consideration, whether she is having discussions with the Department of the Environment on this issue, and whether sufficient priority is being given to the problems of small businesses in rural areas and the extent to which it will be possible to improve the guidelines in the foreseeable future?

Mrs. Fenner: I can reassure my hon. Friend that we recognise the need to strike the right balance between the

interests involved. We adopt a flexible approach to development proposals. We recognise the need to provide more jobs and to improve amenities in areas which are adjacent to towns and villages.

Mr. John: Is not the real criticism that the balance is entirely wrong in the countryside, in that we are growing vast quantities of unwanted cereals while we are short of protein crops and farm woodlands? Does the Minister accept that the Ministry's reluctance to issue a White Paper that gives any signs for the future is an irresponsible attitude to adopt?

Mrs. Fenner: We have a consultation paper on woodlands policy, and the entire issue is under that sort of review. We examine carefully any proposals involving first-grade agricultural land if we believe that there is other lesser grade land available for the purposes that are envisaged.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that a number of county councils of varying political colours are granting themselves planning permission to develop good agricultural land for industrial purposes? As the Government are committed to the preservation and improvement of the environment, will my hon. Friend have better consultations with her opposite numbers in the Department of the Environment?

Mrs. Fenner: We always have good consultations with our opposite numbers in the Department of the Environment. We are consulted at all stages in the preparation of structure and local plans and on all planning applications for areas of more than 4 hectares if they are not within an agreed development plan. That enables us to ensure that the policy for the protection of agricultural land is taken fully into account in the planning processes, whoever is involved.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

4. **Dr. Marek** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial provision will be made in 1986 for payments in environmentally sensitive areas under the Agriculture Bill 1985.

Mr. Jopling: We estimate that expenditure in a full year will be £6 million if, as intended, five or six areas are designated during 1986. Expenditure during 1986 will depend on the timing of environmentally sensitive area designation and the conditions applicable to each area.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister confirm that the expenditure will be for the first tranche of areas to be so designated? Will there be further tranches? If so, when will they be announced, and how much further expenditure does he envisage?

Mr. Jopling: We shall have to see how we get on with what we hope will be the first five or six areas. Any extension will depend on the availability of cash at the time.

Sir John Farr: I ask my right hon. Friend to be a little more forthcoming. Who are likely to be the recipients in the environmentally sensitive areas, and for what purposes will the moneys be paid over?

Mr. Jopling: In general, we are seeking to preserve traditional and historic types of activity in areas where such activity is threatened. We want to encourage people who are carrying out, let us say, a grazing policy, in areas which are threatened with being ploughed up for large acres of grain, to keep that form of husbandry.

Mr. Dalyell: For those of us who were in Committee, will the Minister expand on the two words in his original answer, "as intended"?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman will know that in Committee my right hon. Friend the Minister of State made it clear that we were intending to designate five or six areas during 1986. The words "as intended" were a way of describing our intention.

Mr. Marlow: Is the money available within the common agricultural policy? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, even if it is not available within the CAP, the policy — as a proportion of overall Community expenditure—will not cost any more this year than last year?

Mr. Jopling: The first step that we took after the British initiative was to allow such schemes to take place under Community law. Currently, there is no Community money available to implement these schemes. Therefore, those five or six schemes will be financed through our own financial resources. I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that the Treasury has agreed to that.

Mr. Home Robertson: Does the Minister's first reply mean that there will be no further areas designated during the course of the first five years? Incidentally, is there not enough gobbledegook in the English language without introducing "environmentally sensitive areas" and the inevitable initials ESAs? Why not use the phrase "heritage areas"?

Mr. Jopling: I understand that in Committee the hon. Gentleman was invited to find a better phrase. He has found a better phrase. Having thought about it for the past five seconds or so, I am not sure that it is better than ours.

Agriculture (Future Prospects)

5. **Mr. Knox** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a White Paper on the future of agriculture.

Mr. Jopling: I believe that the agriculture industry is best helped by being kept fully informed of our thinking for the future of the industry and of the efforts we are making to secure its long-term prosperity. However, I am prepared to consider all options, including a White Paper.

Mr. Knox: In view of the uncertainty and aprehension felt by some farmers in this country, does my right hon. Friend agree that guidelines of objectives for the future of agriculture would be helpful and keep confidence high?

Mr. Jopling: Yes. I intend to take opportunities which are offered by speeches, debates and similar events to make known the Government's view on likely developments. I intend to do that where it will be helpful. I know that some people speak about the possibility of a White Paper. The difficulty is that one tends to explain the situaton in a White Paper as it is one minute and, because of the speed at which events are currently changing within the European Community, it is likely to be out of date within a month.

Mr. Torney: If the Minister decides to issue a White Paper, will he consider the huge cereals surplus currently

in this country and also the colossal cost to the British taxpayer of those cereals and their storage? According to experts in the industry, those cereals are apparently unusable?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman will recall that one reason for our not being been able to take more positive steps to deal with the cereal surplus was the action of the German Minister in applying a veto to price cuts in cereals last year. The best thing that I can do is to send the hon. Gentleman a copy of a speech that I made to many German farmers in Berlin a week ago today, from which he will see that I tried to deal with that pressing problem to which he is so right to draw our attention.

Mr. Ralph Howell: When my right hon. Friend is formulating his policies for the future, will he bear in mind the difficulties that he has experienced with the milk quota system? Will he give careful consideration to a semi-permanent set-aside system to take out a percentage of each agricultural holding, preferably by encouraging a lage-scale woodland planting scheme?

Mr. Jopling: We are giving urgent attention, as we have done for many months, to every device—physical and financial—to deal with cereal surpluses. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the consultation paper, to which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary referred, on encouraging farm woodlands.

Mr. Donald Stewart: In the light of the debate earlier this week, what action does the right hon. Gentleman intend to take on the reported speech of the EEC Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries, who said that he intended shortly to ask member states for a further £450 million to reduce the cost of disposing of "uncontrollable surpluses", as he called them? Is it not time that the Government took a stand to end this madness?

Mr. Jopling: I am aware that the Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries has made proposals for extra money to deal with the existing surpluses. I suspect that many members of the Council of Ministers will feel that it is not helpful to find a lot more money to deal with the surplus stores in Europe if they are just going to build up again within the next year or two.

6. **Mr. Spence** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set up a royal commission to inquire into agriculture's current situation and make recommendations as to the future of the industry.

Mr. Jopling: I do not consider that a royal commission would be an appropriate response to agriculture's problems.

Mr. Spence: Will my right hon. Friend keep this matter under review? As he will be aware, in the light of his Berlin speech, the external and internal pressures on the industry are reaching enormous proportions. There are pressures with respect to land use, conservation, use of the countryside, urban development, and so on. Does my right hon. Friend not think that a fully blown royal commission looking to the future might be a much better way of proceeding than has been suggested?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend feels strongly about this idea. I shall certainly keep that point in mind. I must point out to him, however, that one aspect of royal commissions is that an unconscionable time passes before they give rise to reports. I suspect that the situation at the beginning of a royal commission's deliberations might have utterly changed by the time its report is published.

Mr. Deakins: In considering the future of agriculture, will the right hon. Gentleman bend his mind to the real alternatives to the present disastrous common agricultural policy which will be fair to consumers, taxpayers, farmers and the Third world? The Third world exports primary commodities which are at present debarred from entry into the Community.

Mr. Jopling: Frankly, I think that the principles of the CAP, if they had been properly managed over the years, could have met all the points to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. In the past seven or eight years both Conservative and Labour Ministers of Agriculture have made points which suggest that, if there had been more responsible management, we would not be into this mess.

Mr. Bellingham: In considering the future of agriculture, will my right hon. Friend look carefully at the agricultural advisory services and try to diversify them so that they help farmers to set up small businesses and other on-farm enterprises? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the funds saved from cutting back on agricultural support should not go to the Treasury, but should be used to promote this form of job creation?

Mr. Jopling: As my hon. Friend will be aware, we are trying to adapt the advisory service more to fit the desires and demands of farmers. That is one of the purposes of the Bill which has just completed its Committee stage. My hon. Friend should take note of the fact that in recent years the advisory service's work has broadened into other things, not least conservation.

Mr. Maclennan: If the Minister is not prepared to publish a White Paper or set up a royal commission—I agree with the latter decision—will he give agriculture a clear view in one of his ad hoc speeches, if that is the way he chooses to deal wih the matter, of how he proposes to rectify the appalling decline in agricultural incomes that there has been during his period of office?

Mr. Jopling: I hope that, in fairness, the hon. Gentleman will recall that the drop in farm incomes in 1985 must be set against the increase of 35 per cent. in the previous year. He might also recall that during the past year the amount of public money from all sources that has gone to the support of agriculture has increased from £1·7 billion to £2·2 billion.

Mr. Key: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have submitted to quite enough humbug from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), which is similar to that to which we had to listen in the debate last Wednesday? Does my right hon. Friend agree that some of agriculture's problems are man-made and that some are natural, such as the weather, which was largely the cause of the fall in farm incomes, a fall which was preceded by a rise in farm incomes which was almost as great? Will he bear in mind the ripple effects that the changes in farm incomes have on the agricultural machine industry, which is in deep trouble following the withdrawal of capital allowances?

Mr. Jopling: I am conscious of the difficulties of all sections of the industry, including the agricultural machinery industry. With regard to my hon. Friend's first

remarks, I have been in the House with the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) for nearly 20 years. I am used to his hesitant humbug, which has not changed over all those years. Anyone who wants to know has only to read *Hansard's* report of that debate to discover what a mess the policies of the parties that sit below the Gangway are in.

Farm Workers

7. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average weekly wage for employed farm workers in England and Wales.

Mrs. Fenner: My Department's most recent wages and employment inquiry shows that for the year ending September 1985 the average gross weekly earnings for all whole-time regular hired men aged 20 and over was £129·92.

Mr. Powell: That is £38·70 less than that of the average industrial worker. Is the Minister prepared to agree that the modest request for a basic wage of £140 for an agricultural worker is £24·40 less than that for an average industrial worker? Why are the Government not considering that matter and taking the appropriate action?

Mrs. Fenner: Statutory minimum rates are a matter for the independent Agricultural Wages Board, not Ministers. About 86 per cent. of full-time adult male workers earn more than the statutory minimum for the hours worked. It is difficult to make comparisons on the basis that the hon. Gentleman tried, because almost half the whole-time adult male agricultural labour force pay little or no rent for their accommodation.

Sir Paul Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend please consider the case of single workers on small farms, and the fact that they must accept the basic minimum wage, although I know that in my district the wages are far higher? She must bear that fact in mind.

Mrs. Fenner: I must again make the point that the independent Agricultural Wages Board fixes the minimum rate. The board has employer and employee representatives. They take a balance of the argument.

Miss Maynard: Is the Minister aware that the gap, currently £38·70, between the average weekly earnings of farm and industrial workers is becoming wider all the time, and that farm workers comprise the biggest group of workers drawing family income supplement because of their low earnings? At the same time, some company directors are paying themselves salaries of £90,000, £100,000 and, in some cases, £125,000 a year. In view of the farm workers' production record, when will the Government honour their pledge that those who increase production are entitled to a real wage and not peanuts?

Mrs. Fenner: I readily acknowledge the notable contribution of farm workers to agriculture's good productivity record, but reward for improved productivity is a matter to be negotiated between the employer and the employee. Many of them do this.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend agree that the massive pay claim submitted today by the farm workers' union, if conceded, would have a grossly inflationary effect and would therefore affect the weekly bills of everybody?

Mrs. Fenner: I am aware that negotiations on this claim are due to start soon, but it is not for Ministers to try to influence those negotiations, because there is an independent Agricultural Wages Board.

Mr. John: Have the Government a secret pay norm which they want to impose on the farm pay negotiations? If so, rather than take it out on the chairman of this supposedly independent body, as they did by sacking Professor Dickson on the last occasion, when he made a higher than desired increase, why do they not make it public? After all, any personal and confidential letter will do.

Mrs. Fenner: I reiterate, the Agricultural Wages Board is an independent body.

Outgoers Scheme

8. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will conduct a survey of the current use of land which has been taken out of the dairy industry under the outgoers scheme.

Mr. Gummer: We have no immediate plans to conduct a special survey on the impact of the outgoers scheme. We shall, however, be monitoring the changing trends in agricultural activities, through existing statistical series.

Mr. Home Robertson: Are we going to see the Minister paying people to take land out of dairy production, then paying people to take the same land out of beef production and then paying people to take the same land out of cereal production, in a highly expensive game of musical chairs, or can we have a sensible strategy for agricultural land use in the country?

Mr. Gummer: The answer to the first half of the question is no; to the second half of the question, yes.

Mr. Dickens: Will the Minister concede that, because land is available as a result of overproduction, it does not necessarily follow that that land has to be filled with residential or industrial development? Why can we not have a few decent golf courses?

Mr. Gummer: Golf courses do not come within my many responsibilities, but my hon. Friend must be right in saying that there are different considerations when we are dealing with land that can be taken out of use as agricultural land for purposes that would enable it to be returned to such use and the situation where it would be covered with concrete.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

9. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information is collected by his Ministry about the number of sites of special scientific interest which have been damaged by agricultural activies over the past 12 months.

Mrs. Fenner: Information on damage to SSSIs is collected by the Nature Conservancy Council and published in its annual report.

Mr. Taylor: In thanking my hon. Friend for her reply, may I ask whether she thinks the agricultural community is careful enough with scientific sites and, for that matter, with ancient monuments?

Mrs. Fenner: Yes, indeed. Government policy on conservation is founded on the voluntary approach. Generally speaking this works very well with the majority of farmers, who are very conservation conscious. The instances of damage to SSSIs should not be allowed to disguise the fact that most biological SSSIs are receiving protection by the good management of the farmers. It is the farmers, indeed, who are providing this.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister aware that only a few months ago her right hon. Friend appeared to become the champion of British conservation? Is she now telling us that the Ministry of Agriculture does not know how much damage has been done to sites of special scientific interest for agricultural purposes?

Mrs. Fenner: Yes, we do know——.

Mr. Hardy: Why not tell us?

Mrs. Fenner: My hon. Friend asked whether we kept the figures. I pointed out what is accurate, that the Nature Conservancy Council keeps the figures, but, of course, we have read the report. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can be reassured by the fact that the figures produced in the report were for a period before the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985, which seeks to close that loophole, came into operation. I think that we should bear in mind that the figures produced by the NCC show that there were only eight cases of serious damage caused by agricultural activities.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that the measures announced by her right hon. Friend the Minister during the past year, and those available through the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission, provide every opportunity to enhance the countryside and the habitat, and that it is high time the anti-farming lobby stopped bashing the countryside?

Mrs. Fenner: I would add to my hon. Friend's remarks that recently we introduced a clause into the Agriculture Bill in Committee, which was generally welcomed and which imposes a general duty on Ministers to seek to achieve a reasonable balance between the needs of agriculture and those of the environment. I trust that that will further expand and improve the position.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that a farmer in my constituency wants to work his land, but the Ministry will not let him? Apparently weeds of scientific value are growing there, but he wants to earn his living. He must sit in the cottage and watch the weeds grow all day. What will the Minister do about that stupid position?

Mrs. Fenner: I am aware that there are certain plants of inestimable value, including some weeds. If the hon. Gentleman will write to me, I shall look into the matter.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

10. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he proposes to announce his provisional choice of environmentally sensitive areas as provided for in the Agriculture Bill 1985.

Mr. Jopling: We are currently consulting the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council over the selection of areas. We expect to receive their final advice within the next three months. Announcements will be made as soon as possible after that, following consultation with the Secretary of State for the Environment and other interested parties.

Mr. Patchett: Does the Minister agree that the proposed £6 million for the ESAs is in terrible contrast to the £1·8 billion for agricultural support? Will he agree to press for the figure to be increased as soon as possible, rather than merely to continue consultations, which seem to have delayed the report?

Mr. Jopling: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be as generous as his hon. Friends on the Front Bench about the introduction of ESAs, which has been warmly welcomed on both sides. To be budgeting to spend £6 million in the first year on five or six of those areas is a good start.

Mr. John Carlisle: What plans has my right hon. Friend to monitor the effectiveness of ESAs?

Mr. Jopling: We shall seek to monitor them as soon as we get them into being. I am sure that many people will pay particular attention to how well they work in practice.

Common Agricultural Policy

12. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his Ministry's objectives in regard to the common agricultural policy; how he is monitoring their implementation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: My Ministry seeks to promote the Government's policies by negotiating for improvements in the common agricultural policy so that it is more economic in its operation and fair to our producers and traders.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend resist all attempts to spend an extra £500 million on vast and ever-growing surpluses?

Mr. Jopling: During the next few months I shall devote my attention to ensuring that steps are taken to bring the production of foodstuffs within the European Community back to a realistic rational and prudent level.

Mr. John: As Herr Kiechle thinks that the way to limit production is to pay farmers more for their produce, and as the Minister seeks to do exactly the opposite, when will he seek to reach a compromise between those two views?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman knows that I made a speech in Berlin last week, and Herr Kiechle was present. I hope that when I next meet Herr Kiechle he will have seen the light.

Cereals

14. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of cereal production for 1985.

Mr. Gummer: The United Kingdom production of cereals in 1985 is currently estimated at 22·3 million tonnes.

Mr. Yeo: Is my hon. Friend aware that, following a very sharp drop in farm incomes in 1985, there are many farmers in East Anglia, especially cereal farmers, who are anxious about possible measures to restrict the production of cereals, and that quite a number of them would favour the introduction of a quota system?

Mr. Gummer: I am aware of that, but I am quite sure that we shall need a package of measures. Foremost among them must be price restraint. There is no way in which we can deal with surpluses without a policy of price restraint.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Wilson** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Prime Minister take time today to study the letter that was sent by the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency to the previous Secretary of State for Scotland saying that if Gartcosh were closed Ravenscraig might not be viable? As the Conservative party's standing in Scotland commands the support of only 14 per cent. of the electorate, and as it is fourth in the opinion polls, is she aware that if she allows the Scottish steel industry to be wiped out, she will also allow her right hon. and hon. Friends who represent Scottish constituencies to face the same fate at the next general election?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, the Government have done a great deal to ensure the future of Ravenscraig as far as we can during the currency of the present British Steel Corporation plan. With regard to the letter, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland replied on 4 February to the letter from the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). He confirmed that the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency had written to his predecessor in November last year confirming the agency's general views on the future of the steel industry in Scotland. He said that this was a private letter. My right hon. and learned Friend has indicated that it is for the Scottish Development Agency to decide whether it wants to make its views known.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that competition is good for the Scotch whisky industry, as for others, and that that might best be achieved by companies such as Bell's and Distillers competing with each other at home and overseas?

The Prime Minister: I confirm that competition is generally good for industry. I wish the industry well in getting increased sales of its products.

Mr. Steel: Without encroaching on the wider issue of the future of British Leyland, can the Prime Minister explain why, when the Land Rover division is profitable, when it has been a symbol of British engineering quality around the globe for 40 years and when it does a great service for our armed forces, she is trying secretly to sell it off to the highest foreign bidder?

The Prime Minister: There will be a full statement on British Leyland later. I think it best to leave the answer until then.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in its wisdom, the Trades Union Congress has somehow found the electricians guilty of conduct unbecoming to the trade union movement? Does she agree that during the past 20 years the two unions most involved in this dispute have——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a bad habit. The hon. Member must ask the Prime Minister a question relating to her responsibilities.

Mr. Temple-Morris: My right hon. Friend is responsible for the wellbeing of the country, for the newspaper industry and for a becoming trade union movement. Have not the two unions involved abused everything that the trade union movement should have stood for during the past 20 years?

The Prime Minister: I gladly congratulate any union, especially the one to which my hon. Friend has referred, which abolishes restrictive practices and overmanning and embraces the latest technology. That is how to have the best and most efficient industry.

Q2. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dixon: Is the Prime Minister aware that during recent years the number of ships in our merchant fleet has fallen from 1,600 to 600 and that the number of men working for British Shipbuilders has fallen from 87,300 to 10,000? According to the news, the unions had meetings with the chairman of British Shipbuilders today and it is reported that another 4,000 men will be declared redundant before the end of this year—half of whom will be from the northern region, which already has the highest percentage of unemployment in mainland Britain. When will the right hon. Lady do something to save that industry, which is vital to an island nation? When will she show the same type of patriotism to our country as she asked for from the British people during the Falklands war?

The Prime Minister: The problems of British Shipbuilders, and shipbuilders the world over, is a shortage of orders. That shortage is difficult to overcome by any of the methods that the hon. Gentleman suggests. Since 1977, taxpayers' support for British Shipbuilders has amounted to £1·4 billion, and accumulated losses have amounted to £800 million.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that there will be a Bill before the House tomorrow dealing with the removal of Crown immunity from National Health establishments? Does she recognise that if the Government concluded their urgent review of Crown immunity that would be welcomed by the House with gratitude and would be immensely popular throughout the country, because it would show the Government's concern to protect the health and welfare of patients?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, we are very concerned to protect the health and welfare of patients. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Health has had this matter under review and I understand that he will make a statement later this afternoon.

Mr. Leighton: Has the Prime Minister noticed the cynical and deceitful way in which, over a period of

months, Mr. Rupert Murdoch has been cold-bloodedly conspiring and scheming to sack his entire work force in one go?

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the Prime Minister's responsibility in this matter?

Mr. Leighton: This has been described in some quarters as Thatcherism in action. Would the right hon. Lady care to say whether that is an accurate description, or would she like to dissociate herself from that brutal and unprecedented action?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that that is a matter for me, but I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is so resistant to getting the latest technology into British industry and to improving newspapers.

Q3. **Mr. Budgen** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Budgen: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the fact that during the previous month the Government have not attempted to hold up the value of the pound, either by wasting the country's reserves of foreign currency or by increasing interest rates. Will she please remind those who are interested in heavy manufacturing industry in the west midlands that they have more to gain from a low pound and lower energy costs than from state protection and state subsidy?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Lower energy costs will be welcome to many manufacturers. Lower exchange rates are not, and must never be, considered as an easy option. The only assurance of sustained success is for industry to be competitive by virtue of its efficiency, not by relying on the exchange rate.

Mr. Torney: In view of the condemnation expressed yesterday by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) of the proposed sale of British Leyland to the Americans, will the Prime Minister reconsider the proposals? Will she make a statement, especially in the light of the threat, as outlined by her right hon. Friend, of no security for the workers at British Leyland?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will be making a statement on British Leyland. Regarding investment from the United States to Britain and from Britain to the United States, inward investment and equity investment in Britain from overseas have created 100,000 new jobs and safeguarded many more. One purpose of our entry into the Common Market was that we might attract investment to this country.

Q4. **Mr. Favell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Favell: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to remind those engaged in United Kingdom car manufacturing that their share of the home market has dropped from 90 per cent. 25 years ago to 34 per cent. now? How many job losses in suppliers such as the steel industry have been caused by this abysmal performance?

The Prime Minister: The performance on productivity has improved, but not by enough to recover a sufficient share of the car market. As my hon. Friend will be aware, the only way to do that is to be competitive not only on price but on design and delivery, and I hope that the car industry will continue to strive to that end.

Mr. Kinnock: British public investment saved BL. Does the Prime Minister believe that British taxpayers saved it so that it could be used for a foreign sell-out?

The Prime Minister: The British taxpayer has been very generous to British Leyland. We wish there to be a secure future for the car industry in Britain and, with that in mind, we have taken decisions which will be the subject of a statement later this afternoon.

Mr. Kinnock: Since the Prime Minister discussed the matter in Cabinet this morning, may I ask what security she believes will be provided, and which assurances can be sustained, in the light of the international car market and the fact that decisions would be made well outside Britain for reasons which would primarily benefit a multinational company outside Britain?

The Prime Minister: The assurances are that one gets a larger share of the market by virtue of being efficient and having a very good distribution mechanism. May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the Labour Government did not object to Chrysler taking a majority shareholding in Rootes.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister believe that that precedent should be followed? Does she believe that after £2 billion of British taxpayers' money has gone into the industry, all the benefit should be reaped by a foreign multinational?

The Prime Minister: If there were a private sector buyer for the whole lot in Britain, that would be very welcome.

Mr. Soames: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with the inevitable great pressure on the defence budget, the time has come for a thorough defence review? Does she agree also that that must include a reassessment of the role of the British Army of the Rhine?

The Prime Minister: We have thorough defence reviews at this time of the year, and the House has several debates on different parts of the defence services, as it will later today. I recognise the question which my hon. Friend is asking, but I must ask him to consider the political consequences of any such review.

Q5. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Maxton: As the Prime Minister and Ministers have consistently said during the past months that we must have regard to the views of the work force of Westland in deciding the future of that company, will she give the same regard to the work force of British Leyland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Government decided not to mount a rescue package for Westland or to put in any more money other than to write off the launch aid of £40 million, which expenditure had already occurred, should the W30 project be terminated.

Q6. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Bottomley: Will my right hon. Friend join others in congratulating the *Daily Star* this week on cataloguing the corrosive and cumulative amount of television violence that comes into our homes? Does she expect the television or broadcasting authorities to take that mounting public concern into account in their policy discussions?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I saw that catalogue of violence displayed over a short time on television. There is much public disquiet about it, which is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary called in representatives of the BBC and the IBA to discuss how they would alter their guidelines on violence to ensure that violence was reduced. We must wait to see what they do, monitor it carefully, and see whether further action must be taken.

Mr. Bell: How much in taxpayers' subsidies has gone into farming?

The Prime Minister: The system of support changed from direct support when we went into Europe. The amount of support through Europe is too high a cost on the taxpayer, and we are trying to achieve a reduction in surpluses.

Mr. Jessel: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend to continue to uphold the excellent standards of British Army bands—which add splendour to royal and state occasions—and which are trained at Kneller hall, Twickenham? As the Public Accounts Committee has today reported its "grave disquiet" at the lack of any financial basis for the decision of the former Secretary of State for Defence to move the bands elsewhere, will the new Secretary of State take a fresh look at the facts?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his valiant campaign in support of the excellent military bands. I note that the report of the PAC on that matter has been published today. Obviously I cannot at this stage reply to that, but I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks — that the new Secretary of State will indeed look at matters afresh in the light of the latest facts.

Sellafield (Release of Radioactivity)

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland) *(by private notice)* asked the Under-Secretary of State for Energy whether he would make a statement about the release of plutonium nitrate at the Sellafield site of British Nuclear Fuels plc in the Copeland constituency yesterday.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): British Nuclear Fuels plc has reported that during maintenance operations yesterday there was a small release of plutonium radioactivity within the main reprocessing building at Sellafield. The incident arose during maintenance operations on a pump, during which air was accidentally blown across a flow of liquid with plutonium in it. This caused a mist with a small amount of plutonium in suspense. Monitoring equipment in the building, which is extremely sensitive, gave an alarm. The staff quickly traced the sources of the escape, shut off the flow of air and instituted procedures for evacuating all non-essential staff.

Tests on staff contamination have so far shown no cause for concern. BNFL will carry out further tests on staff over the next few days. On present evidence, there was no risk to the public.

A member of the nuclear installations inspectorate was on site and was notified at the time. My Department and other interested Government Departments were notified shortly afterwards. The company has estimated that a very small radiation release from the building of 50 micro-curies may have occurred, but no release was, in fact, discernible from its monitoring equipment outside the building.

The nuclear installations inspectorate has already initiated an investigation in co-operation with the radio-chemicals inspectorate, and will make a statement about the incident within the next few days. The company is also conducting its own inquiries into the incident.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. When, if ever, will it be possible to quantify the total of material that was lost in that release? Is it true that, contrary to statements given to me yesterday by BNFL, some material did in fact escape into the atmosphere and was effectively released from the site?

How many of my constituents and others employed at the plant are still under medical supervision, and what is the nature of the tests that they are likely to have to undergo?

Will the Minister discount the inevitable, predictable and unjustified opportunist calls that are likely to be made for the Government to close the plant, which would immediately throw 11,000 of my constituents out of work?

Will the Government institute the most rigorous inquiry and ensure that reports are available to the House and public as soon as possible?

Will the Government convey to the management of BNFL the fact that the industry can have a future only if there is public acceptance of its activities? Is it not clear that a regular series of such incidents, whether they are serious or not in terms of the nuclear material involved, will simply undermine public confidence in the industry and the political credibility of those who seek to support it?

Mr. Goodlad: The precise amount of the discharge will be known when the inquiry has been completed, and I do not wish to anticipate its finding. About 50 people were evacuated, and as I said, they are undergoing medical tests. I heartily endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about resisting any suggestion that the plant should be closed. The report will be published. I endorse what he said about the necessity for public confidence and public acceptance. I trust that there will be no regular series of incidents.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): Many hon. Members are well aware of the dangers of reprocessing this difficult material. Is it not encouraging that the management of the establishment had proper early warning system which ensured that there was an amber alert? Should there not be confidence on the Goverment Benches, and I hope on all other Benches, that at least the management have proper procedures to deal with such difficult situations?

Mr. Goodlad: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Is the Minister aware that the EEC has described Windscale as the source of the worst radioactive pollution in western Europe? In view of this plant's deplorable record and of the fact that assurances from BNFL are about as reliable as assurances from the Government, will the Minister, in the interests of the people of Cumbria, Northern Ireland and the west of Scotland see that this dirty and dangerous plant is closed?

Mr. Goodlad: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is no. On the whole, the company has a very good record.

Sir Hector Munro (Dumfries): Should not these events be kept in proportion? Does my hon. Friend agree that those who live near nuclear plants in the Solway and Irish sea areas have the highest confidence in the management of those plants and hope that they will continue in the future?

Mr. Goodlad: I heartily endorse my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Minister aware that the repeated incidents at Windscale make it increasingly difficult for those of us who support nuclear power to defend the industry? Our position, both in the House and in our constituencies, is becoming quite untenable. Is the Minister aware that, between my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and myself, 11,000 of our constituents work in this industry in west Cumbria? When Members call for the closure of Windscale they do not understand the catastrophic effects that it would have on an area of high unemployment. Is not the answer to this question to demand of the Windscale authorities higher and higher standards so as to secure the objective of zero or near-zero effluents in aerial atmospheric discharges and marine discharges, as is proposed, by 1991?

Mr. Goodlad: I do not wish to anticipate the evidence of the inquiry, but the hon. Gentleman should keep the significance of this incident in proportion, as we all should. In this respect at least, I should not wish to make the hon. Gentleman's position in his constituency untenable.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no risk-free way of harnessing energy and that, in comparison with the nuclear industry, the coal industry is far worse in this respect? Is he aware that two of my constituents have been killed in coal mines recently, and that the effect of a pit on its environment, in terms of spoil, building and the amount of land taken is far worse than that of any nuclear installation? By contrast, does not nuclear power have a first-class record?

Mr. Goodlad: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I endorse everything that she has said.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Has the reprocessing operation been restarted? If not, when does he anticipate that it will be restarted? Can he give the House any guarantee that when it restarts, discharges, both accidental and regular, will decrease rather than increase?

Mr. Goodlad: The operation of the plant restarted today. I have every hope that there will be no further discharges.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Are there any statistics available about the number of deaths per 100,000 people and the number of injuries per 100,000 people who are working in the nuclear power industry that can be compared with statistics for the coal industry? If they are available, could we have them? If they are not available, could they be provided?

Mr. Goodlad: They are available and they are favourable. I shall give them to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Does the Minister recall that this incident occurred in a portion of the plant that is reserved for the de-canning of isotopes that are used for stripping metal from radioactive elements? Will he take note of the fact that, if the Select Committee on the Environment's study of radioactive waste disposal has done its job, it ought to tell him when he receives its report that the recycling of radioactive materials is quite unnecessary for the survival of the industry and that it ought to be stopped? If that is the result of the Committee's report, will he support it?

Mr. Goodlad: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. I shall of course read with care the report of the Select Committee.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Can the Minister tell us how near to public property the particular part of the plant was in which the incident happened? Can he confirm that there have been over 300 incidents with safety factor risks at this site in the last 30 years, of which yesterday's was the third serious incident? Can he also tell us whether he and his Department are satisfied with the safety and modernity of the plant and buildings, given that the reported view of hon. Members who recently visited the site on official duties is that in many respects the site is primitive, even in 1986?

Mr. Goodlad: The site is subject to inspection by the nuclear installations inspectorate, upon whose advice the Government rely. As I have already said, I do not wish to anticipate the report of the inquiry into this incident.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take it after the statements.

Mr. Skinner: In view of the fact that I have raised it before——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take it after the statements. — *[Interruption]*. Order. I shall take points of order after the statements. Business statement.

Mr. Skinner: It arises out of that statement. I am being gagged.

Business of the House

3.43 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Until Seven o'clock private Members' motions followed by a debate on a Government motion to approve the White Paper on the channel fixed link.

Remaining stages of the Australia Bill (Lords).

Motion on the Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order.

TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Wages Bill.

Remaining stages of the Atomic Energy Authority Bill (Lords).

Motion on the Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order.

Motion on the Precept Limitation (Passenger Transport Authorities) (Prescribed Maximum) Order.

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY — Opposition Day (7th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "Government Economic Policy and the Level of Unemployment".

Motions on the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order and the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order.

Motion relating to the Housing Revenue Account Rate Fund Contributions Limits (Scotland) Order.

It is expected that the Chairman of Ways and Means will name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Until about Seven o'clock, a debate on the multi-fibre arrangement, followed by a debate on the report of the fraud trials committee chaired by Lord Roskill. Both debates will arise on motions for the adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY — Second Reading of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill (Lords)

Afterwards, there will be a debate on a motion to take note of EC Document No. 7163/85 relating to new community energy objectives.

[Debate on Monday 17 February
Relevant Document
7163/85 Community energy objectives
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 5-xxvii (1984-85) para 2.]

Mr. Kinnock: In recent weeks the Opposition have had to provide time for debates on Westland and British Leyland. Next week we must provide time for the scandal of the 3·4 million people who have been made unemployed as a consequence of the Government's policies. As there is no rush, would not the country be better served if the Government gave time next Tuesday to debating the plight of the jobless instead of using their time to present legislation that will cut the wages of those who are, already poor? When will there be a debate on this week's report by the Select Committee on Employment to discuss the various ways of assisting the long-term unemployed?

Why will the House have only three hours to debate the White Paper on the Channel fixed link? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that is an appropriate period for a debate on such a crucial issue?

Why will the right hon. Gentleman not find proper time for the debate on the order to limit precepts for the police and fire services, when rising crime rates are a matter of major public concern? Why can we not debate these proposals to reduce resources for the inner-city police and fire services earlier next week?

An examination of next week's business reveals that the Government are squeezing a debate on the Channel fixed link White Paper into three hours, despite the great importance of that issue. The Government are pushing through secondary legislation to cut funds for education, for public transport, for housing in Scotland and for the police and fire services. All those matters will be dealt with late at night in very little time. Next week's business is the agenda of a Government who hope that they can avoid having their policies properly debated and who hope, even more, that their policies are not recorded.

Mr. Biffen: I am not sure that I can entirely satisfy the Leader of the Opposition. I think that next week's business is a sensible balance between private Members' business, legislation and general debates. I do not suppose for one moment that come this time next week we will feel that we have misused our time.

The Wages Bill is an important piece of legislation, and I cannot relate it to the parody that was represented by the Leader of the Opposition. The House will benefit by giving that legislation a Second Reading.

The Select Committee on Employment's report on long-term unemployment has only just been released. It is customary for the Government's observations to be available before any subsequent stages. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will consider that through the usual channels.

The Government may consider extending the debate on the Channel fixed link and would be happy to have discussions on those lines with the right hon. Gentleman.

Finally, I note the strictures upon the police and fire services order. I believe that that is being arranged at a time which is not without precedent in the arrangement of business, but if the right hon. Gentleman would like to have the matter re-examined, we shall be happy to oblige.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): May we have an early debate based on early-day motion 280 signed by 80 right hon. and hon. Members of all parties and headed "Miscarriage of Justice"?

[That this House notes the widespread concern felt in Parliament by eminent scientists, by other responsible observers and by members of the public who have viewed programmes on the matter screened by Channel 4, that Anne Maguire, Patrick Maguire (senior), Vincent Maguire (then aged 17), Patrick Maguire (then aged 14), Sean Smyth, Patrick O'Neill and the late Giuseppe Conlon, sentenced in 1976 to long terms of imprisonment since served, now appear, despite confirmation of their convictions at the time by the Court of Appeal, to have been entirely innocent of the crime with which they were charged; further notes at the conclusion of the debate in

the other place on 17th May 1985, the recognition by the Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Home Office of the strength of feeling on this matter in that House and his pledge to draw the attention of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what had been said; and therefore earnestly urges the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the interests of the highest standards of British justice of which this country needs to feel rightly proud, to move without delay for a review of these convictions, either under the provisions of section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, or by such other public process of review as he may deem appropriate to this disturbing case.]

Should not the High Court of Parliament take up the Maguire case in defending the rule of law against terrorism? Should we not ensure that the sword of justice is kept shining bright?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend puts his case very eloquently. I think he will understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has already written to him on that matter, and I am not sure that I can add much to that. I will say that I shall draw his remarks to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): In the light of the statement about Sellafield, will the Leader of the House arrange for a full day's debate in Government time on safety installations at Sellafield and other nuclear plants?

Bearing in mind the number of early-day motions on the Order Paper about the problems of funding theatres and concert halls, especially in the provinces, post-reorganisation of local government, will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a statement to be made on that subject next week?

Mr. Biffen: I shall refer the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question to my right hon. Friend with ministerial responsibilities for the arts. I realise that there is great and natural concern about the Sellafield incident. I am sure that we would all wish to have the report available before making subsequent comment. I shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not want to raise too much easy optimism about the possibility of a debate in Government time.

Mr. William Benyon (Milton Keynes): My right hon. Friend will have seen early-day motion 208 on the formation of an Anglo-Irish parliamentary body.

[That a Select Committee be appointed to give further consideration to the establishment of an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary body. Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; That the Committee shall consist of 16 members; that no motion shall be made for the nomination of members of the Committee or their discharge unless: (a) notice of the motion has been given at least two sitting days previously and (b) the motion is made on behalf of the Committee of Selection by the Chairman or another member of the Committee; that five be the quorum of the Committee; that the Committee have power: (a) to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place; and to report from time to time; and (b) to appoint specialist advisers to supply informaton which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference; and that this be a Standing Order of the House.]

Will my right hon. Friend tell me what progress has been made?

Mr. Biffen: A number of tentative inquiries have been made through the usual channels about this matter.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House accept that it is extremely rare that we are given the opportunity to thank him for providing time for debates in which we have an interest? On this occasion I must thank him for providing time for a debate on the multi-fibre arrangement on Thursday. Will the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry be participating in the debate? It is important that he should do so, as he has been closely involved with the negotiations for a long time, as opposed to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), who has been appointed Minister for Trade only very recently. Secondly, if next Thursday is like today, and several statements are made, the time for debate will be extremely short. Will he ensure that the full three hours is given to the debate?

Mr. Biffen: I fully recognise the argument that the hon. Gentleman advances about next Thursday's business and how it can be affected by statements, and I shall bear that in mind. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not take it amiss if I say that thanks from him are rather like a Grecian gift. I shall consider his thanks most carefully. I shall convey to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry his interest that he might take part in the debate.

Sir Frederic Bennett (Torbay): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is probably already aware that there is a delegation of Polish so-called parliamentarians in Britain. It was only this morning that I learned that their visit here included governmental hospitality. If we cannot have a statement on the subject, will he at least draw it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary that this is an especially unfortunate moment to choose for upholding such an invitation? The House will be aware that Lech Walesa, the trade union leader, is about to go on trial. Will my right hon. Friend also draw it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend, before he meets these so-called parliamentarians, that there is a Polish Government in exile in this country? Will he ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend makes that fact clear to our visitors?

Mr. Biffen: My right hon. Friend requests me to make known his views to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, and I shall do so. However, I should tell my right hon. Friend that I met the Polish delegation and that I was pleased so to do.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House consider early-day motion 385 on the privatisation of Welsh water?

[That this House views with total opposition the Government's proposal to privatise water and sewerage services in Wales; and believes that it endangers a century of public control and improvement of these services and flood protection schemes, provides no safeguard against the future level of water charges and commands no support amongst the Welsh people.]

Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the fact that we had only 28 minutes yesterday to ask questions on the statement of the Secretary of State for Wales? There are 38 Welsh Members and we had only 28 minutes to debate

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such a major matter with the Secretary of State. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the House to have a debate on the matter next week, or as early as possible, so that we can allay any fears that we have not been given all the facts by the Secretary of State for Wales?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales gave a measured and balanced statement on Welsh water. I shall draw to his attention the hon. Gentleman's comments. I must say in all candour that there is little likelihood of an early debate on the topic in Government time.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There will be two statements following business questions, and they will be followed by an important debate in which there will be great pressure on time. I shall allow business questions to continue for a further 10 minutes. If questions are brief, I hope that I shall be able to call all those who have been rising in their places.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I appreciate that there is to be debate today on the Royal Navy but will my right hon. Friend say when there will be an opportunity to have a general defence debate? Some of us, particularly those who are near the Molesworth cruise missiles site — which has been the subject of a demonstration today—would like the Liberal party and the Social Democratic party to have the opportunity to explain the apparent differences in their policy.

Mr. Biffen: I have such faith and confidence in the Liberal party and the Social Democratic party that I am certain they will not need Government time in a full-scale defence debate to inform us of their differences.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Many of us appreciate that Ministers do not bump into one another frequently, according to the recent revelations on another matter, so will the Leader of the House make a special effort today to see the Secretary of State for Energy or one of the junior Ministers? I see that the Secretary of State is at the end of the Front Bench. I should like the right hon. Gentleman to make it clear that on the matter of Sellafield some of us are disturbed about the fact that we cannot put any trust in British Nuclear Fuels plc, because it told a pack of lies three years ago about the waste. Only a few weeks ago it said that there were only a few kilograms of uranium nitrate deposited and it turned out that there were 440 kilograms in total and it admitted yesterday, belatedly, that some of the nuclear fuel had escaped. In view of that and the Labour party policy, which is a little different from that explained today, will the right hon. Gentleman take all those matters into account and call for an independent public inquiry so that the British people can know the true facts about Sellafield?

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is trying to tag on behind the question put by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) calling for a debate about Sellafield. I can be no more forthcoming in my answer than I could to the Liberal party spokesman.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Considerable concern has been expressed in north-east Kent about the implications of the Channel tunnel White Paper. Will my right hon. Friend consider protecting the interests of Back Benchers by ensuring that those of us who seek to represent those interests have sufficient time to debate the issue properly?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes a point which was originally put by the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition about the desirability of extending the debate. I am perfectly happy to consider that.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): May I add to the worries of the right hon. Gentleman for next week and ask him as a matter of urgency to investigate the enormous pressures which *Hansard* reporters are working under in trying to get the Committee proceedings made available to Members? Is he aware that in the Scottish Standing Committee, although we finished at a civilised time, the report of the proceedings of Tuesday afternoon, was not available until 10.30 this morning?

Mr. Biffen: If the hon. Gentleman will get in touch with me formally about the difficulties of *Hansard* reporting, I shall see what can be done.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I am sure that my right hon. Friend, with his usual diligence, will have read my Adjournment debate, which took place just before Christmas at 7.30 in the morning, word for word. I am sure that he will have particularly read the reply from the Minister who agreed that it was time for Parliament to review the working of industrial tribunals and the way in which they have become over-legalistic after 10 years in operation. It is time that the House reviewed that, so may we have a statement?

Mr. Biffen: I shall draw that to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Further to the answer to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on the Select Committee on Employment's report on long-term unemployment, if the Leader of the House cannot find time for a debate next week will he assure the House that we shall have a debate on this important matter and important report in Government time in the near future? On the matter of the Government studying the report before they make observations, will the right hon. Gentleman speak to his right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General and tell him not to rubbish reports before they are even published.

Mr. Biffen: I heard my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General make some pertinent comments on that programme. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so sensitive about having to contend with that sort of criticism. However, I think that there is a good tradition in the House that when the reports of Select Committees are presented we have the Government's observations on them before any subsequent development. I shall bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's request.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, earlier this afternoon at Question Time, anxieties were expressed in several quarters about taking agricultural land for industrial development? In view of the Government's commitment to the preservation of the environment, does my right hon. Friend think that it would be a good idea to have a short debate in the near future on this subject?

Mr. Biffen: If my hon. Friend has a particular example that will illustrate the more general problem, he may do us all a good service by having a debate on the Adjournment.

Mr. Toby Lloyd (Stretford): I note the right hon. Gentleman's comments to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about a debate on fire services in metropolitan areas. Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise the great anxiety about reduced resources for the fire services? There will be a serious danger to life, because the standard of fire cover will be reduced. Will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that there will be an adequate debate on the issue so that it can be properly discussed?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I do not concur with the premise to his question, but I shall certainly consider his point.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will there be an opportunity at an early date for the House to discuss the value of the Select Committee system as it is at present set up? It is of particular interest to my right hon. Friend and the House that some Select Committees, such as the Select Committee on Defence, seem all the time to deal with matters that are now past history, such as Westland, when the vast majority of the people want the Government to get on with the job of running the country.

Mr. Biffen: The departmental Select Committee system is of fairly recent origin. I should have thought that, on the whole, we are acquiring experience of its utility to the House and that there are many advantages in the way it works. I note that that view would not necessarily be universally endorsed.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Further to the earlier question on the establishment of an Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier, can the right hon. Gentleman say whether anything will happen in that respect?

Mr. Biffen: Under the terms of the Anglo-Irish agreement, elaboration is necessary, involving the Parliaments of the United Kingdom and of the Irish Republic. I have no reason to doubt that, in due time, details will emerge.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the House has spent more than an abnormal amount of time discussing the employment of 3,000-plus people at Westland and that many people will welcome his announcement today about a debate on the multi-fibre arrangement, which involves the employment of more than 500,000 people? Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the House will have an opportunity to discuss the proposals contained in any ultimate arrangement between the European Community and the United Kingdom before that arrangement is agreed within the EEC?

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend says about Westland, but I suspect that, when we are a little more distant from and have possibly a little more balance on these matters, we shall recognise that Parliament was wise to spend the amount of time it has on this issue. I shall draw my hon. Friend's comments on the multi-fibre arrangement to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I think that my hon. Friend will understand that, for the moment, we should make the best use we can of the time available next week.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): The Leader of the House will have seen with pleasure, and relief, that the independent colliery review procedure has decided to keep open Bates pit in Blyth in my constituency, despite vehement and vicious opposition from the NCB. In the light of that decision, which is welcomed by the coal mining community in Northumberland, will the right hon. Gentleman have a word with the chairman of the NCB so that he immediately says, perhaps with the agreement of the Secretary of State for Energy, that this decision is accepted by the NCB? That will allay the anxiety that still persists in the north-east coalfield.

Mr. Biffen: I note the decision of the colliery review board. I was wondering whether the hon. Gentleman and I might meet up to have a drink to celebrate such an occasion, unless that were to prove too embarrassing to him, either socially or politically. As to the wider issue involving the NCB chairman, I shall refer that matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Government were criticised by many of their friends for the apparently undue haste with which they assessed the complicated bids for the Channel tunnel project? Is my right hon. Friend aware that it will seem somewhat insensitive, less than three working days after the White Paper has been received by the Kent local authorities, to compound those sins by rushing ahead yet again to have a debate so soon on the White Paper? Is there not a feeling that this reckless speed means that the Government have something to hide?

Mr. Biffen: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I assure him that there is no question of anything being hidden. It is a matter of whether it would be appropriate for the House to have the chance to have a debate before the treaty is signed. I take note of my hon. Friend's comments, but I must tell him that I see little likelihood of that item of business being dropped from next week's programme.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Now that the European Commission has formally adopted proposals for next year's farm price review, which would have disastrous effects on the beef and cereal support systems, especially north of the border, will the right hon. Gentleman consult the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about an early statement and debate before the Council of Ministers meets to make a decision?

Mr. Biffen: I note and endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments on the European Commission's proposals. I shall of course refer those comments to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): As it now seems clear that the Opposition have no desire to initiate a debate in Opposition time on the events at News International and as members of the electricians union are bullied and intimidated when they try to go to work, may we have an early debate in Government time on this subject?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend has identified a matter of signal importance to the development of the United

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Kingdom's economy in what is happening at Wapping. I cannot guarantee a debate in the near future in Government time, but, clearly, I shall keep this matter under consideration.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that last night the new General Synod met and voted on a free vote by 427 to 6 against Sunday trading and asked the Government not to push a three-line Whip on the debate on Sunday trading? Will my right hon. Friend take account of that when he announces the business some time in the future? Will he provide time for a debate on the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977? A constituent in Leicester has suddenly brought seven members of the ethnic community to the city, resulting in ratepayers having to pay the cost of putting those people up in a three-star hotel at £186 a night. Should not this matter be corrected and the House have an opportunity to debate it?

Mr. Biffen: Procedural arrangements in the debate on Sunday trading are entirely a matter for my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary. As he is not here, I shall ensure that he knows the views not only of my hon. Friend but of the Church of England Synod.

My hon. Friend in his second point has raised a matter that is within the experience of many hon. Members from all parts of the United Kingdom where people are homeless as he described. I cannot offer a formal debate in Government time, but I wish my hon. Friend well in any efforts he may make to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Mr. Speaker: Statement—Mr. Kenneth Clarke.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise immediately out of the business statement?

Mr. Dubs: It arises out of questions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is a little late, but I shall take it.

Mr. Dubs: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. You told my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that he could not make a statement.

Mr. Speaker: I did. Just to clear this point for every hon. Member, I take points of order arising out of questions immediately after Question Time and other points of order in their usual place, at the end of statements. As the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) has a question arising out of questions, I think that he should have raised it at the end of Question Time. However, I shall take his point of order now, as I said I would.

Mr. Dubs: I must have misunderstood you, Mr. Speaker. I thought that you asked my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover not to ask a question after Question Time.

Mr. Speaker: I did, because it did not arise out of questions.

Mr. Dubs: My point of order is this: in answer to a question about Crown immunity, the Prime Minister said that the Minister for Health would make a statement later today. Do you know of any such statement, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: No; I regret to say that I do not.

Inner Cities

4.10 pm

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Government help to people living in inner city areas.

We are all only too well aware that people who live in many inner areas of our cities suffer from a wide range of long standing problems. The Government have increased the amount of central Government money spent on employment and training programmes, urban regeneration and industrial assistance in these areas. We have taken a number of measures, including setting up last year city action teams to co-ordinate and target Government effort in the seven inner city partnership areas.

In order to complement and build on that existing work, we have now decided to try out a new approach to the task by intensifying and bringing together the efforts of Government Departments, local government, the private sector and the local community in eight small inner city areas.

This initiative is a further step to improve the targeting and enhance the benefit to local people of the money channelled through existing central Government programmes. They include the employment and training programmes of the MSC, the Department of Trade and Industry's programme of regional and industrial assistance, the Department of the Environment's urban programme, and the Home Office programmes of black business support and grants to support staffing of services to ethnic minority populations.

Within the chosen areas we shall try out new approaches, particularly on training provision, and employment or self-employment opportunities for local residents. That will be tackled through projects and activities of wider but direct benefit to the residents of the areas concerned and their environment. We shall seek to stimulate enterprise and provide a stronger base for the local economy. We shall give special attention to the problems of young people from ethnic minorities where they are particularly disadvantaged.

To test our approach we have selected eight areas which are diverse in their character but whose residents all share problems of deprivation and lack of opportunities. They are not necessarily the eight most deprived areas in our cities, but the people who live in them need more employment opportunities, support for their local business economy, and a better physical environment. We shall introduce our new initiatives in Notting Hill and north Peckham in London, the Chapeltown area of Leeds, north central Middlesbrough, the Highfields area of Leicester, Moss Side in Manchester, St. Paul's in Bristol and Handsworth in Birmingham.

We shall be establishing small task forces in each of those areas. They will work with the local authorities and local community and voluntary organisations. They will quickly seek to attract private sector participation.

We shall seek early discussions with the local authorities concerned about the details of this initiative. We hope to persuade the local authorities to join us and use their own programmes alongside our own in a concentrated and targeted effort to improve work prospects and the quality of life in those areas.

Large sums are already available to the chosen areas under existing Government programmes, but, in order to help the initiative get off the ground, the Government will be supplementing the sums with £8 million of additional money of which £3 million will be found from within my Department's existing provision and £5 million will be found from the reserve.

The initiative will be led by a team of Ministers drawn from the Departments of Employment, Education and Science, Trade and Industry, Environment and the Home Office. My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will have overall responsibility for the co-ordination of the initiative. I shall have responsibility for its day-to-day management and supervision with the support of a small central unit. This inner cities initiative will complement and not replace existing Government programmes.

I hope that the House will welcome a bold experiment in concentrating all available efforts and resources in a joint way on the improvement of job expectations and the quality of life of the residents of those small inner city areas.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): That is a mouse of a statement compared with the scale of the problem that our inner cities face. There is little new in the statement to encourage our employed inhabitants in our declining inner city areas. It is a measure in line with the policy of the Secretary of State for Employment to improve the Government's image on employment for which over £1 million is being given to an advertising agency. The measure is designed solely to counter the overwhelming impression held by 3·4 million unemployment claimants—the real level is nearer 5 million—that it is being used to improve the Government's image and to show that they are doing something about unemployment when people realise that they do not care a damn about mass unemployment.

The statement confirms the victory of the Secretary of State for Employment over the management of such programmes and the downgrading of the Secretary of State for the Environment who was in charge of the city action programme of which we have heard little. It is a game of musical chairs for which the only new resources are £5 million — a kind of transfer fee for the change of chairmanship.

I can at least welcome the fact that the statement recognises the problems of our inner city areas and the need to co-ordinate—why do we not call it planning?—and use public funds to create jobs. That is Labour's programme for returning our people to work.

Will the Minister confirm that those new resources, if we can call them that, of £5 million will not begin to replace the 28 per cent. cut in real terms since 1981 of inner city grants and the losses of rate support grant in the years that he mentioned in the statement which amount to almost £1·7 billion? Those are in addition to the cuts of 70 per cent. in the housing programmes. All that should be compared with the £5 million that he offers the unemployed in those areas.

Does the Minister accept that the statement implies that there is a connection between social disorders and race riots and the extraordinarily high rates of unemployment among the ethnic minorities in those areas? Will the policies advocated earlier in the year by the Home Office

[Mr. John Prescott]

—contract compliance and discrimination to provide more training places and jobs for the ethnic minorities in those areas—be pursued by the Government?

How many jobs are likely to be created by that new £5 million, and what criteria led the Minister to choose those areas? Does the Minister accept that his statement that the Government will work with local authorities will be seen as a major change in the Government's attitude, if they were to carry it out? The Government have done more to damage local democracy and reduce local democratic accountability than any other Government.

The statement says that the Minister intends to "persuade" local authorities. That is further proof that the statement is to do with a panicking central Government trying to improve their image when doing nothing to reduce unemployment levels created and deliberately maintained by Government policy.

Mr. Clarke: True to form, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has gone straight into knockabout politics and completely ignored the substance of the statement to which he is meant to be addressing himself.

The announcement that the Government have made today will be taken much more seriously in Peckham, Chapeltown, Highfields and the other places that I named. The essential part that the hon. Gentleman has missed is that the new initiative will go alongside all the other initiatives, policies and expenditure of this Government in all their Departments. The urban programme administered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has trebled in money terms and doubled in real terms compared with expenditure when the Labour Government were in power. Spending on employment and training measures through the MSC has doubled since we have been in power. A great deal of that expenditure already goes into those inner city areas. We estimate, as best we can, that £670 million of central Government money goes into inner city areas on environmental, dereliction and employment measures alone.

Within those eight small areas, we shall see what better targeting and concentration of effort can produce. We shall get all the agencies of central Government, local government and the local private sector to work together to produce results.

The new money, in addition to at least £75 million going into those areas under central Government programmes, amounts to £8 million only. We are talking about small areas of cities — Peckham, Chapeltown, Handsworth—with a total population in all of them of about 300,000. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that £1 million in each of those areas over and above the central Government money already going in, which we are going to target more directly, will have a most significant effect. The hon. Gentleman was misled by the impetuous barracking of those behind him who misunderstood what I was saying. He was quite wrong to seize on that point and to stress it.

The hon. Gentleman talked about other matters, some of which have relevance to what we are talking about and others which have not. I do not think it helps in this area to draw the simplistic connection which he does between riots and employment. Indeed, it is an insult to the inhabitants of inner cities to believe that they react in criminal ways to the problems that they all face.

The question of other ways in which we can improve in particular the position of ethnic minority youngsters who are at a disadvantage in the employment market was seriously considered by the Select Committee on Employment, to which I gave evidence yesterday. It is indeed true that there are various measures of positive action which can be taken to improve the job opportunities of those ethnic minorities. A large part of this initiative will be to try to build up black business skills and to give more management training and more opportunities for self-employment among ethnic minority communities. We intend to tackle the task much more seriously than the hon. Gentleman, who seems disposed to criticise it.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): I reassure my right hon. and learned Friend that, in spite of the rather churlish reaction of the Opposition this afternoon, his statement will be extremely warmly welcomed by all of the many varied elements in the population in North Kensington. On a personal note, I should like to say how glad I am that the increasingly urgent questions which I and other borough councillors have been pressing on Ministers, drawing attention to the special problems of Notting Hill, have borne fruit in this most imaginative response.

I wish to ask whether the implications of the new policy are that if prominent areas of derelict land or old structures in Kensington are likely to be dramatically changed, the borough council and bodies like the Kensington Society will be taken into full consultation and, indeed, whether the Member himself might also be consulted?

Mr. Clarke: We obviously hope to produce quite significant improvements in that part of the borough, represented by my hon. Friend, which is particularly deprived. A key part of our efforts is to involve as quickly as possible the local authority, the people who live in the deprived part of London which we are trying to help, Notting Hill, and certainly — most importantly — the Member of Parliament. As soon as we set up the task forces, we will get them on to the ground and in touch with the local people whom we are trying to benefit as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): Will the Paymaster General accept the alliance's best wishes for the members of these eight small task forces, especially if they start by sparing hard-working voluntary workers in the inner cities their present interdepartmental paper chase, which is so frustrating to their work?

Can the Paymaster General explain to the House the conspicuous absence of any Treasury Minister from the managing team, bearing in mind that this downward spiral of deprivation is largely due to the application of false Treasury dogma which has now crumbled away under events? The modest sum of £8 million—or £5 million of new money—will very quickly need supplementing.

Lastly, why is there not one mention in the statement of housing accommodation or dwellings, since the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows very well that the inner cities desperately need decent and appropriate housing?

Mr. Clarke: If we find evidence of interdepartmental paper chases, certainly that is one of the first things that

we shall have to eliminate. Most importantly, we shall bring together the efforts of all central Government Departments even more closely in the areas concerned, which I think will be of benefit to the residents in particular.

We are obviously not going into the whole business of housing allocation and housing policies in these small areas. However, it is certainly right that in all these areas there is a great need for further improvement in the environment, which includes improvement in living conditions. We wish to continue to improve the environmental setting in a way which benefits local people by providing additional employment, training and work experience for those who live there rather than just improving housing and the environment by employing contractors and people who live in other parts of the city.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to bear in mind that there is a further important statement after this and an important debate. I shall allow questions to continue until 4.45 pm, and then I think that we must move on.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Urban deprivation cannot be effectively tackled unless there is a cohesive interdepartmental approach. Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that this statement will therefore be widely welcomed in Bristol in achieving a cohesive interdepartmental approach?

In carrying out these proposals, will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that the teams encourage self build projects along the lines on which I have written to him in the past?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said. I think that his first point is extremely valid and important. I am, of course, aware of the extremely successful self build project which has been organised in Bristol. I look forward to getting to know it more closely and to seeing whether the example of Bristol can be spread to some of the other cities which we are discussing today.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to prove that his proposals are not derisory, will he tell us, in the case of each area affected, how much money has been withdrawn in rate support grant compared with the new money, as he calls it, which he now proposes to offer? Will he also take into account that some of us expected that at least there would be a major proposal for assisting the inner city areas, which would be a proper thing to greet with enthusiasm? What about those areas which have had chronic unemployment since 1979 and earlier persisting all through that period which have had money taken away from them? When are we going to have new money to compensate for the cuts in regional aid and the cuts which have greatly added to our unemployment problems and all the other dangers which go with it?

Mr. Clarke: It is certainly the case that a number of local authorities in this initiative, because of the totality of their expenditure on all their programmes covering the entire territory for which they are responsible, have overspent and incurred penalties. There have been many debates in the House because of that. I should have thought, therefore, that those authorities and those who live in the areas would welcome the fact that, in those parts of the authorities which are most particularly deprived, there is now this opportunity to see what can be done, to get more of the central Government programmes co-ordinated with the local government programmes, to add the new money which I have announced and to tackle the problems of these small parts of the authorities concerned.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, when he visits Highfields in my constituency tomorrow night, he will not find the same corrosive pessimism which disfigures the Opposition Benches? He will find energy and optimism; he will find many businesses which have been built and are run and owned by Asians; he will find a large sector of owner-occupation; and he will find many effective youth training schemes and everybody anxious and willing to co-operate with him.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am particularly grateful for the fact that, as he knows, by coincidence, he has pressed me to visit the Highfields area of Leicester and to meet at least 200 Moslem inhabitants tomorrow evening. That promises to be an extremely good start. I am most encouraged to hear of the reception that he believes I shall get there.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): We in Middlesbrough are not interested in bold experiments; we are looking for real job creation. There are 11,401 unemployed claimants in Middlesbrough, and the £8 million over eight areas will represent a very meagre morsel of the national cake. That having been said, this modest initiative will be supported by Middlesbrough district council and Cleveland county council.

The Minister has referred to private sector participation. Is what he proposes dependent upon private sector participation, or will that be additional to the £8 million?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I know that Middlesbrough suffers from some of the most acute problems of unemployment in the British Isles. Indeed, Middlesbrough has the highest rate of unemployment in Great Britain outside Northern Ireland. For that reason, we have already tried a large number of things in the area, including starting up job clubs in our Department, and the Cleveland initiative of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and we are now adding to that with this experiment in a small area in the north of Middlesbrough with a further £1 million or thereabouts, coupled with a co-ordination of all our efforts and agreed targets. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important to get together as quickly as possible with the council so that we can agree on the objectives which local government and central Government wish particularly to pursue to see whether, by concentrating our efforts on the worst of these problems and starting with the combined effect of the programmes, we can produce some visible improvements.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) in saying that the whole of Bristol will welcome the initiative. When my right hon. and learned Friend evaluates the experiment—he has described it as such—will he take into account the recent evidence from Bristol city council that deprivation of the sort that is commonly referred to as inner-city deprivation also occurs on outer-city housing estates, such as Southmead and Lawrence Weston in my constituency? Will he look beyond the traditional inner city?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. A great deal of deprivation exists on outer-city housing estates around many English and Scottish cities. One must choose where to experiment with new initiatives of this sort. The eight areas that we have chosen are not the eight most deprived inner-city areas, but they have the most diverse individual features. They are a good selection of deprived areas on which to try out the new initiative.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Is the Minister aware that all those in the inner city of Manchester will see the initiative as a pathetic cosmetic exercise which will do nothing to resolve the problems and as merely papering over the cracks? When will the Minister provide the real finance and facilities for local authorities that the Government have stolen from them?

Mr. Clarke: It is possible to make a significant change in any area the size of Moss Side through existing central Government programmes, plus the additional money that I have announced, if we have the good will of those involved in the locality. I trust that on reflection the hon. Gentleman and his council will discuss with us how best to apply these funds.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that I join the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) in saying that we shall work together with the district council, although I am banned from it, for the sake of the people of central Middlesbrough whom we both represent? I find £8 million a small sum. Over what period will it be spent? Would not my right hon. and learned Friend have done a better job if, instead of setting up a huge bureaucratic machine, he had found an ex-ICI director, given him £1 million and told him to get on with it?

Mr. Clarke: We are talking about the next financial year. The money, together with existing central Government programmes, will be best expended if we have the co-operation which appears to be forthcoming from Middlesbrough and Cleveland. Private sector participation is important, but my announcement is in no way conditional on private sector involvement. We shall seek to identify as quickly as possible local private sector interests which will be willing to participate and add their efforts. Given the good will in the north-east, we shall not have too much difficulty in finding suitable people to do something about the endemic problems of central and north Middlesbrough.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is the Paymaster General aware that he demeans himself and his Department by making that derisory non-announcement, which is an insult to the House? Is he aware that the Government's chief contribution would be to restore the cuts in the urban programme and to give partnership status to the London borough of Newham, which would be worth £10 million, which is more than the total of £8 million? Is he aware that the Select Committee will investigate the employment aspect of these matters, and that we shall visit some provincial centres, including Liverpool, this weekend? Does he think that that is constructive? Will he undertake to consider the Select Committee's comments? Will he denounce and rubbish the report when it is produced before he has even thought about it?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that it is possible to make bids for various areas, and to say that they would benefit more from another initiative than the eight selected areas, but that is not a fruitful approach. We intend to see how we can change the position in those eight areas, which we have chosen precisely because of the diverse nature of their problems. As I told the hon. Gentleman yesterday, I welcome the fact that the Select Committee will visit deprived parts of our cities and make recommendations on the position of ethnic minorities in the labour market. I certainly undertake to consider its proposals with care.

I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's final strictures. The public and the House would have found it extraordinary if a Minister charged with responsibility for employment who is particularly concerned about the problems of the long-term unemployed, as my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State and I have been during the past six months, could not have given a view yesterday about the proposition that £3·5 billion of public spending could somehow solve the problem. My views were restrained, but perfectly fair in the circumstances.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the teams' emphasis must be on action and decision, and that Left-wing councils which often dominate deprived inner city areas should not be allowed to lessen the teams' impact, because inaction has often produced the present unhappy results? Does he further agree that the way to deal with inner cities is to give the teams some clout to form something like the docklands board?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that what we do, the action we agree upon, and how quickly we can apply ourselves to targeting all our efforts on the biggest problems regarding the environment and work opportunities matter most, especially to those who live in those districts, whom we should have in mind. That is what we intend to do. The docklands development corporation and the docklands board in Liverpool are outstanding examples of the success that can be achieved in restoring and bringing new life to run-down areas. The docklands development corporation was particularly concerned with redeveloping a large area of derelict land, and with bringing it into fresh and productive use. Today we are talking about inner city areas, where there is not the same area of land to be developed, and about how we can target our efforts on fairly concentrated numbers of people.

Finally, I agree that the people who live in those areas will be interested in discussions about action programmes and what we shall do, and will be dismayed by the knockabout knee-jerk reaction from the more Left-wing Opposition Members. I hope that we shall get that out of our systems today so that, when we meet the people on the ground and the councils, they will be altogether more constructive.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Is the Minister aware that £5 million will do nicely for three or four acres of the Handsworth Lozells area of Birmingham, but at £15 a head it is not up to the task? So far as my constituents and I are aware, the contribution so far from the city action team is a big fat zero. If the Paymaster General is taking day-to-day charge of the matter, will he for once involve the elected Members of Parliament who represent the areas? Will he also rely on the local authorities? Will he ensure that he is not misled by many

of the self-appointed windbags who maraud our inner cities as so-called community leaders and who have vested interests in ensuring that solutions are not forthcoming?

I offer the Paymaster General one piece of advice and a warning. My advice is that he and his Ministers, not civil servants, would do well to spend some time listening to what general practitioners who work in Handsworth Lozells have to say about their patients. My warning is that my constituents, whether old, young, black or white will not tolerate any more activity and resources, however meagre, unless they carry out the work. They are not prepared to continue to see busloads of outsiders coming to do work that they can do themselves.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with just about every point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), despite the vehemence with which he has made them. I also think that most of the advice that he gave to me is well worth heeding. At present £7 million is being spent in Handsworth under the urban programme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has been closely involved in it. The Government intend to complement, not replace, this programme. We hope to work closely with the council, with the elected Member and with the responsible leaders of the local community. We shall listen most carefully to the population and those who know the population well. The general practitioners, cited by the hon. Member for Perry Barr, are an excellent example. I shall seek to follow his guidance and visit the part of Birmingham which he represents. I hope we shall achieve success with the scheme.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I appeal for short questions, please.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton North-East): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's initiative, but will he say more about the role of the private sector? Does he accept that Opposition Members forget that the private sector can add substantially to the sums that are available?

Mr. Clarke: We shall seek to identify as quickly as possible some private sector partners and try to get partners in local industry to give us some assistance. One problem which we will find in many of these areas is that there is not a great deal of local private sector activity to give business training, provide the self-employment opportunities, and so on, that are required. We will also have to persuade some of the employers whose premises are in the outer city areas to recruit more actively from the inner city. We shall be seeking to do all that.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank the Paymaster General for explaining why the Department of the Environment did not fight too hard to sponsor this programme. The question we face is unemployment. Can he tell us specifically how many new jobs will be created?

Mr. Clarke: The Department of the Environment is closely involved in this programme. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that rumours that anybody was fighting to sponsor this programme are greatly exaggerated. For those who are intrigued to know why the Department of Employment is in the lead, the best explanation is that we have two members in the Cabinet whilst other Departments have one. These initiatives cover all areas of Government activity, and all Departments will be committed to them.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): As the representative of the Charnwood area of Highfields, I welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend has announced today. The people of Leicester have felt forgotten under successive Labour Governments which had, but wasted, the opportunity to give sums of money to the inner cities. Is it not ironic that some of the people of Leicester still vote for the Labour party which does not want to give them any money today?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. I know Leicester and I know the Highfields area reasonably well. The area is not as well known to the general public as it might be compared with other slightly more fashionable areas. I agree that it is Leicester's turn, and I hope we will achieve something in that city.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I understand that Chapeltown in Leeds is in the constituency of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Will the Paymaster General ask his right hon. Friend whether it would be better to supply more money for schools, housing and jobs? That is what is needed in Chapeltown. As desirable as this programme may be in a small way, it will not touch the problem.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science will be a member of the team of Ministers directing efforts in Chapeltown and elsewhere. I agree that, in all those areas, one has to look at the combination of problems from which they suffer. We are not redirecting efforts from any other area. This initiative will supplement all the other considerable efforts that we are making in the inner cities.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that over the past 10 years the consistent experience of the Small Business Bureau has been that the two great problems for small business have been training in management skills and access to capital? Will my right hon. and learned Friend make sure that the problems, which are even worse for the ethnic minorities, are tackled with vigour? Will he perhaps make use of the loan guarantee schemes to reassure the banks, which seem incredibly reluctant to lend to would-be entrepreneurs from the ethnic minorities?

Mr. Clarke: We already have the Home Office black business initiatives. We have recently set up three enterprise agencies in areas with high concentrations of ethnic minorities to create business opportunities there. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment has written to the banks to draw their attention to what we are trying to do. I shall certainly take on board the well-judged points of my hon. Friend in our efforts in these eight areas.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman really believe that the initiative that he has announced today will be of any great benefit to the areas mentioned? Can he explain why the inner city areas of Newcastle and Gateshead are not on his list? Does it mean that we are in some way being penalised or neglected? Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell me how the latest Government initiative in my constituency, the city action teams—CATS as they are affectionately known—has improved the city since they

[Mr. David Clelland]

came to the area? Is he aware that what we need in the inner city is not CATS but MICE—more inner city expenditure?

Mr. Clarke: None of the proposals that I have announced today is in any way at the expense of other parts of the country. It is a new initiative with additional resources for the eight small areas I have named. The city action teams will continue. They cover much larger areas, and they have achieved a great deal of success in co-ordinating the activities of central Government Departments across those areas. The team in Newcastle has been one of the most successful of the seven city action teams that we have. It does not help at all to seek to denigrate that team because we have chosen Middlesbrough, not Newcastle, for this initiative.

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his initiative. Can he explain why Bradford was originally on the short list but is not included in the statement today? There are authorities in the statement that have contributed, through their own council policy, to the economic decline from which they now suffer. Bradford has a long record of responsible government and constructive use of Government money.

Mr. Clarke: There are always invidious problems when choices have to be made. Our selection of Chapeltown in Leeds does not mean that we minimise the problems of Bradford. If one is trying out a new initiative of this kind, one makes the best progress if one forces oneself to make a selection of eight areas and tackles the problems on a manageable scale. Of course, we shall see how successful it is and consider the lessons for other areas.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Is the Paymaster General prepared to admit that the paltry sums that he has offered must be less than what he first asked for from the Treasury? Would he care to say what those initial sums were and by how much he had to divide to arrive at the sum he has now offered?

Secondly, on mixed ventures between the public and the private sectors, is he aware that the Greater London Enterprise Board has created jobs for one tenth of the cost of the London Docklands Development Board? The sum involved is £1 million. If the scheme succeeds, will he offer each and every other similarly deprived ward in the country £1 million, including those in Lambeth?

Mr. Clarke: The last part of the question is somewhat inconsistent with the first. The sum of money which is directed to such small areas is significant when one looks at the total population. It is no good getting up and airily waving that aside. I have heard these claims for the Greater London Enterprise Board before, but I find that they are not substantiated. I believe that that enterprise board has a patchy record in making any real contribution to the economy of London.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): One of the reasons why this statement is especially welcome on this side of the House is that we are all aware of the vast sums of money that have been spent already in some of these areas. Much of that money has been subsequently wasted. My right hon. and learned Friend is helping with the targeting of that money so that it is properly spent.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues address themselves to one of the worst problems—law and order? Will he look into the legacy of Lord Scarman which we discovered from the press today was responsible for two rapes and one murder in Brixton last summer?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has put his finger on one important matter that we are seeking to implement in this initiative. We will seek to target more effectively the large sums of money already expended in these areas. I shall draw my hon. Friend's second point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department — —[HON. MEMBERS: "Condemn it."] I believe my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department would defend the practices and experience of the police in the inner city areas. I do not think it is right for my hon. Friend to make a rather sweeping attack on the efforts and achievements of the police.

Mr. Eric Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that I am from an area where there is a task force? The proposals that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has put forward today on behalf of the Government will be regarded by my constituents as a sick joke. He must be aware that, despite the cosmetic activities of a task force, there has been no real creation of jobs in the area. Liverpool 8 has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the country. The constituency which covers Liverpool 8 is at the top of the league in unemployment. Is it not clear that the time has come for the Government to get down to the task of creating employment in those areas, and not to come forward with this ridiculous load of nonsense this afternoon?

Mr. Clarke: Merseyside has an urban development corporation working in the south docks, it had a garden festival and it has the Merseyside task force spending £21 million on Merseyside. Like most Ministers in this Government, I have visited it frequently. I would not minimise the grave problems in and around Merseyside, but I ask the hon. Gentleman not to have a blinkered view. If he ever has an opportunity to visit Middlesbrough, Highfields, Handsworth, Peckham or Notting Hill, he will find grave problems there as well. We are justified in trying out initiatives in those areas.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Is the Paymaster General aware that his statement is long on good intentions but woefully short on financial commitment? Although it is right to use scarce public resources as a lever to attract more private investment, how are the task forces to avoid the mistakes of previous programmes which have merely created well-paid jobs for people commuting into the inner cities and precious few job opportunities for people who live in the inner cities?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman can assert that there is a lack of resources, but I have already said that £670 million-worth of Government money already goes to inner cities. We are talking about how to add to that. I believe that we have had an effect.

The hon. Gentleman's latter point was deeply relevant. It is no good having an inner city programme which spends

money on buildings in the inner city if the employment generated is generated for building workers from the suburbs and further afield. Our main focus will be on benefiting residents — the people who live in the deprived areas—and seeing what we can do to improve their environment and job prospects.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): If £1 million is a significant sum for my constituents in Moss Side, how much more significant are the millions of pounds that have been withdrawn from Moss Side as a result of the withdrawal of grants from the city of Manchester?

Mr. Clarke: Manchester council has got itself into penalty as a result of overspending on the totality of its programmes throughout the city. If the hon. Gentleman claims that that has caused difficulties in Moss Side, I should have thought that he would have welcomed our coming into Moss Side seeking his agreement and that of the local authority to target Government programmes better and to add money.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Why did the Government choose Notting Hill instead of the adjacent area of Kensal Rise and Harlesden, where inner city problems are more acute, as the Minister's colleague the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) knows? The housing problem is more acute there than in any other London borough and the concentration of ethnic minorities is higher than anywhere else in London. Was Notting Hill chosen because the right hon. and learned Gentleman wanted to help the borough and the Member of Parliament? Has my area been penalised because its Member of Parliament comes from this side of the House?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman cannot assert that. If he looks at the list of Members of Parliament whose constituencies are affected by the proposals, he will find, not surprisingly, that far more of them come from his side of the House than mine. I assure the hon. Member that we selected the areas first and only then discovered the Members of Parliament we would have to approach and work with. I can understand his disappointment on the part of Kensal Green. We had to make a choice. I concede that he is probably on sounder ground wishing that we had included Kensal Green than following the line of some of his hon. Friends, including some who will benefit, who try to pretend that the scheme is of no earthly use in Moss Side.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Secretary Channon to make a statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I can almost anticipate the points of order. I have already allowed the statement to run on nearly 10 minutes more than I originally planned because I fully understand its importance. However, with the best will in the world, I cannot get everybody in on every statement. I will follow my usual pattern and ensure that those hon. Members who were not called today will get preference on another day.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member is not challenging what I have just said.

Mr. Madden: Not in any way, Mr. Speaker. Does not this situation illustrate vividly the difficulties that you are put in by the Secretary of State for Employment being a member of the House of Lords and therefore utterly unaccountable to the House and to hon. Members whose areas will not get one penny out of this meagre announcement? We are unable to ask why we have been left off the list. It is an outrage——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. The Paymaster General is, after all, a member of the Cabinet.

British Leyland

4.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Paul Channon): Yesterday, I informed the House that talks were at an advanced stage on the proposal for a merger between Land Rover—Leyland and the Bedford Commercial Vehicle subsidiary of General Motors. It is the Government's intention that, subject to satisfactory terms and conditions, and the receipt of firm undertakings from GM on its manufacturing and sourcing intentions, these negotiations should be brought to an early and successful conclusion.

I also confirmed that, following an approach by the Ford Motor Company, wide-ranging but, at this stage, exploratory discussions with the Austin Rover Group were in progress which might lead to a proposal for the merging of those businesses. I wish to inform the House at the earliest opportunity of the most recent developments affecting these discussions, in particular as regards Austin Rover.

The Government would have preferred to have waited until the exploratory talks had clarified the difficulties and opportunities a merger might have created and then taken a decision in principle, on the basis of a considered analysis, whether to pursue the possibility further. Speculation surrounding these exploratory talks has itself given rise to very great public concern and uncertainty. If that were to continue for an extended period, it could have seriously damaged the prospects for Austin Rover's business, its employees, its suppliers and its dealers. Nor would such a period of uncertainty have been helpful to many people associated in comparable ways with Ford's business in this country. Concern about these developments was expressed very clearly on both sides of the House in yesterday's debate. The Government have given full and immediate consideration to the situation so created. We have decided that the right way to end the uncertainty is to make it clear that the possibility of the sale of Austin Rover to Ford will not be pursued.

It is the Government's intention, with the agreement of the BL board, that negotiations should be pursued for the separate privatisation of Unipart by the early placement of shares with United Kingdom institutions.

Collaborative arrangements in the motor industry will become increasingly necessary and important. Austin Rover Group's successful relationship with Honda is an example of that. I hope that Ford and Austin Rover will also consider positively other opportunities for collaboration. I should like to pay tribute to Ford's contribution to the British economy through research and development, manufacturing and employment.

I hope that the Government's decision and the ending of uncertainty will leave Austin Rover free to devote its efforts to the further development and growth of its volume car business, building on creditable progress which has already been achieved.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Can the Secretary of State explain why he has managed to attract some members of the Cabinet to sit beside him today although he was signally left on his own with his unfortunate task yesterday?

As for the proposals for Land Rover-Leyland vehicles and Bedford, can the Secretary of State tell us what is the difference between what he calls a merger and a takeover? Are the Government involved in the discussions to ensure that no arrangement which sells our crucial British interests is arrived at? What are the implications in terms of jobs and of the location of manufacturing plant?

In view of the history of an industry in which assurances have frequently been given, how will any assurances be made binding and unbreakable? Will the Government arrange for a full debate in Government time at an appropriate stage so that the full implications for jobs and British interests can be assessed properly before any conclusion is arrived at?

In making it clear on behalf of the Opposition that I welcome with relief the decision taken by the Cabinet this morning to abandon talks about the sale of the Austin Rover Group to Ford, may I remind the Secretary of State that he and his colleague, the Minister of State, derided the Labour party's motion yesterday suggesting that the talks be abandoned forthwith? Although the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues voted last night against the motion that the talks should be abandoned, is it true that the Cabinet had to accept the force of the Labour party's case?

Has the Secretary of State reflected on the fact that if the Opposition had not exposed the existence of the talks, flushed out the Secretary of State on Monday and had not debated the issue yesterday in a way that allowed the full force of parliamentary and public opinion to be expressed, the likelihood is that the secret talks would have been continuing with the prospect of the sale of Austin Rover still alive? Why were talks that were never in the public interest ever started?

Why are the Government persisting in the sale of Unipart, the loss of which will only weaken the strength and integrated force of the British Leyland group at a time when all its strength is required to survive and prosper now that, at last, it has been permitted to remain British?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman asked about General Motors in relation to Land Rover-Leyland. As the House will remember, I made a full statement a few days ago. I outlined, with care and in some detail, the undertakings that we would require before any deal with General Motors would be acceptable to the Government. The question of a further debate in the House is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. Obviously, the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point is noted.

As to the reason for deciding not to pursue the talks between Austin Rover and Ford, I have tried to explain why, in my view, it is essential at this stage to end uncertainty. I believe that it is in the interests of Austin Rover and Ford. It will be widely welcomed in the House that the Government have taken an early decision to end that damaging uncertainty.

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, which will be warmly welcomed by the work force of Austin Rover at Cowley. I especially thank him for the speed with which he has killed the damaging speculation, which arose as a result of the leak of the confidential talks. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the workers of Unipart who, contrary to what the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) suggests, welcome the move towards privatisation? Will they have the opportunity to be included in any anticipated share issue?

Mr. Channon: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. He certainly welcomes our decision. I shall take on board his point about the work force of Unipart. I believe that our decision on the privatisation of Unipart will be widely welcomed.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the Secretary of State answer the question that I put to the Prime Minister earlier? Why is the Land Rover division not being treated separately, for example, as a management-employee buyout? Will he confirm that it is profitable, that Land Rover has been a symbol of British engineering round the globe for almost 40 years and that it is of crucial importance to our armed forces? If it is not treated separately, the suspicion will remain that it has been put in as a succulent carrot along with the truck and bus division at the same time as an announcement that production of the American jeep is ceasing. Will he justify that?

On the matter of the Leyland truck and bus divisions, why are the Government not giving a similar commitment to open negotiation and public discussion, which the right hon. Gentleman pointed out would have happened if the Ford deal had been going ahead?

Turning to the Austin Rover Group, will he confirm that the British Leyland board will be left to get on with the management of that company? Given the successful turn-round, will he confirm that no public money has been put into the company in the past three years and that it now has a successful range of vehicles, which are competing well, not only on the domestic market, but in the European market? Does he agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that in this episode there is one cause for rejoicing, which is the fact that the House of Commons has been able to change the Government's mind?

Mr. Channon: It is very nice to welcome the right hon. Gentleman to these discussions. On public expenditure, as the House has been informed on many occasions, guarantees under the Varley-Marshall assurances of up to £1·5 billion are available to BL, which is a factor that the House would do well to bear in mind. I am convinced that the proposals regarding Land Rover are in the best interests of the company. That is also the view of the British Leyland board. I would not put forward the proposals to the House if I was not convinced that they were in the best interests of Land Rover, including the opportunities that will arise from increased distribution in the United States. I hope that the talks will go well. Obviously, I shall keep the House in touch with the progress of the negotiations.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Will my right hon. Friend accept the grateful thanks of many workers in the west Midlands and Birmingham that the cloud of doubt over the future of Austin Rover has now been lifted? Does he accept that the work force and the management will work and continue to work with new models designs and with productivity plans to produce, in collaboration with other manufacturers, the type of products that will lead the company into renewed prosperity in the knowledge that the Government have been able to give a helping hand?

Mr. Channon: Yes. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me in encouraging British Leyland to make progress along those lines, so that it increases its share of the market and makes increasing efforts to produce profitable results. In that way we can ensure a secure future for Austin Rover without it being a drain on the taxpayer.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Would the right hon. Gentleman care to comment on the report I have had that a deal has already been agreed between Bedford Motors, part of General Motors, and Leyland and that it was probably signed on 27 January, but could not be announced that day because that was the day that the Westland fib fabrication exercise was at its height?

Mr. Channon: That is a strange allegation. I have known the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) for a long time and occasionally we hear such remarks. As I have already told the House, talks are at an advanced stage on the proposal for a merger between Land Rover-Leyland and Bedford Commercial Vehicles. No decisions have been taken. I assure the House that that is the exact position.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to stop the Austin Rover talks. Will he use the opportunity to discuss with the owners of motor vehicle assembly plants how to get more British content into their vehicles and will he draw into the discussions the motor components buyers, whose future rests on the success of the assemblers?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend makes a good point and I am grateful for his support. He will remember that my predecessor announced an improvement in content in December. The figures that I gave to the House yesterday about Ford are extremely impressive.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): In view of the links between Austin Rover and Freight Rover, will the Secretary of State reconsider his insistence on including Freight Rover on the menu being offered to General Motors? Alternatively, will he insist on an undertaking that the manufacture of Sherpa vans and the jobs that go with it remain at Washwood Heath?

Mr. Channon: I will not consider taking out Freight Rover. It is part of the discussions that are taking place. I have already explained to the House the sort of assurances that I shall be seeking and I have nothing to add.

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, on behalf of the 8,000 Land Rover employees who work in my consitiuency, I shall be looking to him and hope that he will look to General Motors if this deal goes through for guarantees on British identity, British content, flagship status for the Land Rover plant at Lode Lane at Solihull, research and development in Solihull and increased commitments to exports, not least to America?

Mr. Channon: I understand and share my hon. Friend's views about all those matters. I assure him that the proposal is good news for his constituents, good news for the future of the company and good news for Land Rover.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): Although I welcome the news that the talks between Ford and Austin Rover have been abandoned, can we be assured that they will not be resurrected with another company? Will the Government do two things to assist Austin Rover? Will they take positive steps to improve the miserable Spanish

[Mr. George Park]

export quota allocated to Austin Rover, and will they finally do something about the differential tariffs which give great advantages to firms such as General Motors, but work against the best interests of Austin Rover in trying to export to Spain?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the extremely unsatisfactory Spanish tariff system. We inherited the position from negotiations long ago. As a result of fresh negotiations before Spain's accession to the Common Market, those differences in tariff will be reduced over a period. At the same time, our reduced duty quota will be increased. Now that Spain has acceded to the European Community, the end of that ridiculous system is in sight.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as usual, the attitude of the Opposition is hypocritical? They know perfectly well that thousands of British workers have good and secure jobs with Vauxhall and Ford, and that many American workers have good jobs with British firms in the United States. Is not investment international? Would it not be in the interest of the trucks part of British Leyland, and Land Rover in the long term, to be part of a big group with worldwide marketing facilities, and would it not increase jobs in Britain?

Mr. Channon: I agree with my hon. Friend. As I tried to point out yesterday, Ford in the United Kingdom employs about 50,000 people, supports more than 100,000 other workers through its dealers and suppliers and spends nearly £750 million a year on product development in Europe, about half of it in the United Kingdom. Any Opposition Member who attacks that does a grave disservice to Britain and to the constituents of many hon. Members.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As a former parliamentary private secretary to Rab Butler, does the Secretary of State recollect that it was the Government in which he served who required the then British Motor Corporation to come to Bathgate? It grew into the greatest concentration of machine tools under one roof in Europe. In those talks, what obligation do the Government believe they have towards Bathgate?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman knows the present position at Bathgate, which is unchanged by my announcement. If we are going back into the history of British Leyland, I should say that the Labour party has a lot to answer for.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the uncertainty that surrounds the future of the Leyland truck and bus divisions is still very much evident? Does he also agree that the possible purchase of Leyland Bus by Laird is not mentioned in his statement? Will he comment on that and say whether another offer is in prospect for that, too? Will he also comment upon the position of Multipart, which is another successful aspect of the Leyland group? As a matter of urgency, will he answer the questions raised by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Miller) in the debate yesterday, so that I can alleviate the anxiety of people in my constituency which, after all, includes the town of Leyland where this great company was born?

Mr. Channon: I shall study carefully what my hon. Friend said yesterday and write to him about the points that I have not already covered. As to the trucks division, the merger proposals are at an advanced stage, and I hope that it will not be long before I can inform the House of the arrangements. As he said, talks are continuing with Laird. My statement today does not relate to Leyland Bus, but I shall keep my hon. Friend closely in touch with progress.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Is the Minister aware that the British public would have expected him to have the good grace to thank the Official Opposition who, with a little help from the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), saved Austin Rover from an American takeover? Although we have been watching the disintegration of the Government before our eyes, the British public did not expect that the Opposition would achieve so much power in such a short time. But why are the Government still considering the privatisation of Unipart? Have the Conservative party in government completely lost their patriotism?

Mr. Channon: Unipart will go to British sources, so I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. I have never heard such rot in my life. We are proposing the privatisation of Unipart, and I believe that the Government's privatisation programme has wide support inside and outside the House.

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend accept congratulations on having the good sense and courage to put an early end to the uncertainty, greatly aggravated by the attempts by the Opposition to make political capital out of the matter? Will he not be deterred by the damaging leak from ensuring that further discussions on collaboration with Austin Rover are pursued and that alternative sources of financing are examined?

Mr. Channon: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks, and I greatly welcomed his constructive speech yesterday. It is right to end the uncertainty that existed, because that is in the interests of the companies concerned. As he said, the Opposition are clearly not interested in the issues—only in trying to stir up trouble.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is it not terrible that Britain imports railway locomotives from the United States while closing long-established engineering works, such as those at Swindon? Is this with the permission of the Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going rather wide of the subject of the statement.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree with that import, and can he tell us whether that deal has anything to do with——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot pursue that line. It is a completely different matter.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I conclude my question?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think it will help, because I do not think the Minister can answer it. This statement deals with British Leyland. If the hon. Gentleman can relate his question to British Leyland, he may continue.

Mr. Spearing: I was about to conclude the question, which the Minister could answer and which is directly

connected to the statement. I was about to ask the Minister whether that deal has anything to do with the one between British Leyland and General Motors.

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman asks about something completely different from the subject of my statement. I shall be in touch with him, but my statement has nothing to do with what he asks.

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the decision he has announced this afternoon, and may I assure him that the decision reached by the Cabinet about Austin Rover and Ford is absolutely right? However, I must tell him that he has done nothing to alleviate the very real fears and anxieties expressed by Conservative Members yesterday about General Motors taking over the remainder of British Leyland. My right hon. Friend referred to a "merger". Is it not accurate to say that what is proposed is a complete takeover by General Motors of British Leyland and that control would leave Britain and go to Detroit? That is what many of us strongly oppose, and we shall maintain our opposition.

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the first part of his question, but he will not expect me to agree with what he said in the latter part. I have already explained to the House the exact details of what is proposed between General Motors and the Land Rover-Leyland group, and, in due course, I shall inform the House of the exact arrangements, if and when the companies produce arrangements that are satisfactory to the Government.

I assure my right hon. Friend that if I was not convinced that the proposals are in the interests of Land Rover and the other parts of British Leyland about which we are talking, I would not put them before the House. I am convinced that such a merger would, if the assurances are satisfactory, lead to substantial benefits to both companies.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Do not the S-bends during the past 96 hours show that the Cabinet is looking increasingly like a headless chicken running around in its death throes?

In persisting in the statement promoting a multinational takeover of British Leyland Truck and Buses by General Motors, is the right hon. Gentleman continuing to tell the House that there is 40 per cent. overcapacity in that sector of the vehicle market? If so, has he tried to convince Oxfam and other aid agencies of that 40 per cent. overcapacity? Is he not aware that they cannot get trucks for Ethiopia and the Sudan to shift food for the millions of starving people?

Mr. Channon: I am saying that there is substantial overcapacity. I explained that to the House yesterday. I also explained the reasons that led me to believe that if a merger on acceptable terms could be arranged, that would be in the interests of all concerned.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): While congratulating my right hon. Friend on his speedy footwork, may I ask what difference there will be to the amount of contribution that the Government are making now, and will have to make in the future, to British Leyland if the General Motors proposals come to fruition?

Mr. Channon: It is clear that the sections of British Leyland that will be involved in any merger between Bedford Commercial Vehicles and General Motors—if satisfactory terms are arranged — are those parts currently making a substantial loss, which is something the House should recognise.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): How can the Secretary of State justify the sale of Land Rover to General Motors? Do not the BL interim results show that last year Land Rover made a profit of £5·7 million and had record sales? Is he not aware that the sale of Land Rover will cause widespread dismay, not only among the work force but among all customers of Land Rover throughout the world? Having decided not to go ahead with the discussions with Ford, will the right hon. Gentleman consider the implications for the collaboration with Honda? Does it not place a great cloud over future collaboration? What is to be the future of the arrangement with Honda?

Mr. Channon: As I said in my statement, I hope that collaboration with Honda will continue. Austin Rover's collaboration with Honda has been very sucessful, and I see no reason why that should change. I very much hope that it does not.

There are substantial advantages for Land Rover in any deal that may be agreed—and that is the view of the BL board, not just my view. The opportunities for Land Rover in the United States, taking advantage of General Motors' distribution network, could lead to greater sales of Land Rover in the United States and other markets and to substantial opportunities for Land Rover's work force and management. If those assurances I have mentioned can be obtained, it will be a very good deal.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the three hon. Members on the Government Benches who have been rising. I hope that they will be brief.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that any objective observer will regard the way in which he has listened to and informed the House as both exemplary and impeccable? However, will he bear in mind that there is still widespread disquiet about the future, especially of the Land Rover-Range Rover group? Will he consider carefully what has been said on that subject from the Conservative Benches?

Mr. Channon: Naturally, I will consider anything that is said from any quarter of the House. I must repeat my belief that I have expressed on a number of occasions to the House that this is the best opportunity for Land Rover. I am exceedingly grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said in the early part of his question.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will my right hon. Friend accept my heartiest congratulations on the wisdom of his statement today? Has he now abandoned all attempts to try to find other sources of finance for the Austin Rover group? It will require additional resources if it is to increase employment, production and its market penetration both in Europe and in the United States. I hope that my right hon. Friend has not abandoned that pursuit.

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Austin Rover's forward plans do not require further Government equity finance. Its financial requirements will be considered in the usual way, in the context of its corporate plans.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that the people of Oxfordshire realise the long-term guarantee of Austin Rover at Cowley is in their making cars that people both here and abroad want to buy, with ever more competitive design, marketing and delivery, while at the same time not being dependent on the Government always being prepared to write cheques on the taxpayers' bank account?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. We must try to get Austin Rover's share of the European car market higher than it is at present.

Mr. John Smith: The Secretary of State appears to be satisfied that he can find what he calls suitable assurances. Can he give the House an assurance that he will not sanction any arrangements that mean the effective takeover of Leyland Vehicles by General Motors so that the power to take decisions passes from Britain to Detroit?

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House what he meant by the political history of this matter when he attempted to criticise the Labour party? Does he not recollect that when British Leyland collapsed as a private sector operation in 1975 it was rescued by the Labour Government against the wishes of the then Conservative Opposition, many of whom are sitting in front of me?

Mr. Channon: I cannot give the right hon. and learned Gentleman the undertaking that he seeks. As he well knows from my statement on Monday, I outlined to the House precisely the full undertakings that I would require. On the second part of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question, I think that the least said about the history of the matter by the Opposition, the better.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you take a few moments later this afternoon to consider the fact that the Secretary of State's statement was made available to the press well before 3 o'clock, yet shortly before 4 o'clock his Private Office denied that the draft of the statement had been finalised? It was not until almost 5 o'clock that the right hon. Gentleman gave his statement to Members of Parliament. Is this Secretary of State carrying on where the last one left off?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the statement given to the press was leaked before the House heard it, that is a different matter. However, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was alleging that.

Royal Navy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Mr. Speaker: As the House knows, we have a rather late start to the debate. A considerable number of right hon. and hon. Members have indicated their wish to take part. I hope that, in view of the time element, they will keep their contributions brief.

5.27 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): This last year has been a busy and effective period for the Royal Navy. Within the NATO area, the Navy has taken part in a series of important national and NATO exercises in the eastern Atlantic, the Norwegian sea, the Baltic, the North sea, the Channel and the Mediterranean. Out of area, the Navy has maintained a constant presence in the south Atlantic, the Caribbean and in the vicinity of the Gulf.

Since our last debate on the Royal Navy, Royal Navy ships have visited a total of 83 countries, including the first visit to a Warsaw pact country, Romania, since 1979. The Navy has made a significant contribution to the surveillance of Warsaw pact shipping worldwide, and has ensured the round-the-clock viability of Britain's strategic deterrent.

Since the last Navy debate, the Navy has also taken delivery of 13 new ships and 22 aircraft, and orders for further ships and equipment for the Navy have been placed to a total value of more than £3 billion.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): How many ships has the Minister ordered?

Mr. Stanley: I shall come to that point later.

Other navies have been busy too—busy in operations and busy in construction. In July last year we saw the largest ever exercise by the Soviet northern fleet, designed apparently as a demonstration of how it might attempt to thwart NATO's reinforcement of Norway and establish Soviet sea control, not merely in the north Norwegian sea and the Barents, but in the south Norwegian sea and the north Atlantic. It was an impressive exercise, although the House will wish to know that the Royal Navy remains confident that, in conjunction with its NATO allies, it could establish sea control in areas of the north Atlantic and Norwegian sea, when so required.

The Russians currently have the largest submarine fleet in the world, with nearly 400 submarines now in service, including 63 nuclear ballistic missile submarines. At least six different classes of submarine are under construction, and a new submarine is continuing to be launched on average once every 35 to 40 days. The Soviet Union has an increasingly formidable fleet of surface warships that includes 320 ships of frigate size and above, and it has just launched the first of a new generation of aircraft carrier of a displacement approximately half as much again as the Kiev class.

The Russians are steadily improving their amphibious shipping. They have the largest stocks of mines in the world. They have one of the largest merchant fleets, the largest oceanographic fleet and the largest fishing fleet. Ships of all these fleets are regularly employed in naval and intelligence collection tasks in addition to their non-military roles. They also have a strong, and still growing,

naval aviation arm, with aircraft such as the Backfire with a significant conventional and nuclear stand-off capability against surface ships.

Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergey Gorshkov can put his feet up on the mantelpiece, well content with his service to his country. There is no reason to expect any slowing down in the pace of the Soviet naval programme under his successor Admiral of the Fleet Chernavin. Admiral Chernavin is a submariner. For the foreseeable future, the Soviet navy will constitute a major, and growing, challenge to the NATO countries.

I stress that the challenge is to the NATO countries as a whole, and it is NATO's collective response to the Warsaw pact's naval threat—not just Britain's—that is all-important. Fortunately, the NATO countries taken together are still way ahead of the Warsaw pact in the strength of their surface fleet, particularly in sea-borne tactical air power. We also continue to have significant advantages in other sectors such as the submarine detection technologies, replenishment at sea, and in the calibre of our seamen.

Many of these NATO maritime advantages are represented by the United States navy and that makes the commitment of the Labour party to send the main element of the USN in this country packing all the more reprehensible and irresponsible. We should be doing all that we can to strengthen the USN's presence in Europe, and not weakening it.

I move on to the Royal Navy's contribution to our defences both in the NATO area and outside. Later on, I shall come to the naval programme.

Of the European members of NATO, the Royal Navy provides the biggest single contribution to NATO's surface fleet. Of the naval assets committed to NATO, the Royal Navy provides the only European ballistic missile firing submarines, the only European nuclear powered hunter-killer submarines, and the only European aircraft carriers and amphibious ships. In defence, it is certainly always possible to argue that we should do more, but I do not think that anyone can reasonably suggest that we are not shouldering our fair share of NATO's maritime defence.

I shall mention two other operational commitments inside the NATO area with which the Royal Navy is continuously involved. The first is fishery protection, provided by the fishery protection squadron, based on Rosyth. Following a recent internal review of our fishery protection arrangements, the Government have concluded that the Royal Navy should continue its fishery protection responsibilities.

Over the years the squadron has developed a great deal of expertise in the surveillance of fishing vessels, in boarding them at sea, and in the abstruse but all-important subject of United Kingdom and EEC regulations governing the protection of a wide range of fish.

In addition to its primary fishery protection role, the squadron also provides valuable back-up to the civil authorities for search and rescue operations, for the protection of our offshore oil and gas platforms and for possible use in support of the Customs and Excise, for instance, against drugs traffickers. The work of the Royal Navy's fishery protection squadron is often, I am afraid, largely unsung, but it does a very important job in small ships, often in thoroughly unpleasant sea conditions, and it does it extremely well.

The Navy's second continuous operational task in home waters is in supporting the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland by patrolling the Province's 150-mile long coastline. During the last year we have replaced two of the ships in this role with more capable vessels. The Royal Navy ships and smaller craft engaged on this task, together with the Royal Marine detachment that serves with them, provides an important deterrent to the insertion of terrorists, arms and explosives into the Province by sea.

Although the commitments of the Royal Navy are largely in the NATO area, the history of the post-war period shows that actual operations are more likely to occur out of area. We have sufficient naval assets to take on some limited commitments outside the NATO area, and we consider it important that this capability is retained. We have no plans to withdraw our naval presence in the Caribbean or in the vicinity of the Gulf.

Royal naval vessels will continue to be maintained in the south Atlantic, but at the minimum force level that is commensurate with our defence commitment to the Falkland Islanders. We shall also continue to maintain our naval presence in Hong Kong in order to help counter illegal immigration there. As the House knows, I announced on 18 December that a Royal Navy task group would deploy to Asia and the Pacific this year. The deployment will be called Global 86. It will allow us to exercise with friendly navies in the Pacific. It will give some excellent opportunities for defence sales demonstrations, it will enable us to strengthen our naval contacts with both allied and non-aligned countries, and, as I said in the Army debate last week, it will enable us to give our Army and RAF exercise in Oman this year—Exercise Saif Sareea—a maritime dimension.

Global 86 should prove excellent value nationally and for those in the Royal Navy ships taking part. I understand that there has been no little enthusiasm to join the ships' companies involved.

I cannot leave the Navy's operational commitments without referring to its success in saving civilians from death and injury. We regularly see on television the way in which Royal Navy and Royal Air Force search and rescue helicopters perform the role of aerial lifeboats and save people from certain death in often appalling flying and sea conditions. In 1985, Royal Navy search and rescue helicopters in the United Kingdom lifted a total of 194 people out of danger from the sea. Overseas, the crew of a Greek merchant ship that was breaking up on a reef off the Seychelles was saved in difficult conditions by HMS Exeter's helicopter.

Most recently, we saw last month how the Royal Navy took part in one of the largest beach evacuations of civilians from a fighting situation since the second world years? Between them Britannia, Newcastle, Jupiter, Hydra, Brambleleaf and the merchant ship Diamond Princess evacuated about 1,400 people of some 50 different nationalities—plus, I understand, one dog of nationality unknown. This evacuation required some fine judgments on putting our ships inshore without undue risk to the civilians being brought to safety. It required the creation of communications links from scratch with those ashore. It required much patient and difficult negotiation, and skilled boatwork and helicopter flying. I know that the whole House will want to send our warm congratulations to Rear-Admiral Garnier and all those involved in that outstandingly successful operation.

[Mr. Stanley]

I now turn to the size and shape of the fleet and to the naval programme. I said at the beginning of my speech that since the last Navy debate orders for further ships and equipment for the Navy had been placed to the value of over £3 billion. The new ship orders represent two frigates, three mine countermeasures vessels, one nuclear hunter-killer submarine, and three conventional submarines, bringing the total number of ships on order to 28.

In considering the naval programme, I of course fully recognise the importance of the actual numbers of hulls. However, hull numbers are by no means the only key factor to be taken into account. Ships not merely need to be present in the area of sea required; they also have to be effective and survivable. There has therefore to be a continuous process of optimising the balance between ship numbers and ship capability.

Simply to ignore the huge sums that we have been, and are, spending to improve both the effectiveness and the survivability of our existing surface ships and submarines, as Opposition Members often do in these debates, is no doubt politically convenient but is in fact highly misleading. I am therefore going to start with the ship capability improvements that we have set in hand since our last Navy debate.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Before the Minister leaves the question of numbers, which I suspect concerns more hon. Members than any other single matter, will he agree that to achieve the Government's programme of a surface destroyer and frigate fleet of 50 or 52 they will have to double their present ordering rate of destroyers and frigates during the next 10 years?

Mr. Stanley: I shall deal in a moment with the destroyer and frigate programme. The ship capability improvements that we have set in hand since our last Navy debate include joint procurement with the Army and the RAF of a further Skynet communications satellite; a major programme for the improvement of Sea Dart, including the production of further missiles; the main production order for more than 2,000 Sting Ray advanced lightweight torpedoes; a new electronic support measures programme for submarines, involving the retrofitting of both our Oberon conventional submarines and our Valiant and Churchill class nuclear powered submarines; an improved hull-mounted sonar for some of our Oberon submarines; and an improvement programme for the towed-array sonars for both our frigates and submarines. The total value of these measures and others taken since the last Navy debate to improve ship capability is some £1·7 billion.

I hope the House will bear in mind that these orders of equipment for existing ships and naval aircraft are operationally every bit as significant and valuable as the orders for new ships.

Turning to the different classes of ship and submarines, with HMS Ark Royal joining the fleet last year, we have settled into the operational pattern described in the last statement on the defence Estimates of maintaining two modern carriers operational and one in refit or reserve at any given time.

HMS Hermes is now on the disposal list and we hope to sell her abroad.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend referred to the fact that he intends to keep two Invincible class carriers in commission. Will he clarify the position with regard to aircraft and air groups? Is it not the case that there will be only two operational air groups and that there could be a deficiency of aircraft and crews? How will the Royal Naval reserve air squadrons, which are working very well, help to keep the front line up to strength?

Mr. Stanley: I shall deal in a moment with the Fleet Air Arm. As my hon. Friend is aware, the assumption is that at any given moment we shall have two operational aircraft carriers. A fairly intensive refitting cycle has to take place. The third aircraft carrier will probably be undergoing a refit—possibly an extended refit.

Since the last Navy debate the final three type 42 destroyers have been accepted into the fleet. The last eight of the type 22s are on order, as is the first of the new class of type 23 frigate. The tenders for the next three of the type 23s have been received and are being evaluated, and we expect to be able to announce the first follow-on order for the type 23 later this year.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stanley: Yes, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I am sure that both he and the House will be mindful of what Mr. Speaker said about the number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to speak in this debate.

Mr. Brown: Does the Minister intend to place No. 2 of the type 23s as a separate order with Swan Hunter, as was previously pledged, or does he intend to treat Nos. 2, 3 and 4 as a package and place all the orders at the same time?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until we reach a final decision on the package for the follow-on orders.

Mr. Brown: A promise was made about No. 2.

Mr. Stanley: No. 2 was committed to Swan Hunter. I believe that that is still the position. As for the remainder of the package, I can go no further than what I have already said. I think that I have given to the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he wanted in relation to the second type 23 frigate. My understanding is that the undertaking that was given that it would go to Swan Hunter still holds good.

As far as our amphibious ships are concerned, HMS Intrepid has recently come out of refit and HMS Fearless's next refit is planned for next year. These refits will help to ensure the operational effectiveness of our LPDs into the mid-1990s. The largely rebuilt landing ship Sir Tristram has just rejoined the fleet, and on present plans the new Sir Galahad will do so next year. We have been progressing our studies both inside the Department and with industry on the options for continuing our amphibious capability and we should be in a position to decide the way ahead later this year.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): Can the Minister confirm that a hovership—I think from Bells—has been delivered to Portsmouth and is under assessment? Is there any future for the hovercraft industry if a hovership is being assessed? Will the Minister please promise that any work for hovercraft will go to the British Hovercraft Corporation?

Mr. Stanley: I cannot anticipate the outcome of the studies on the amphibious options. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement is able to elaborate on the hovercraft possibilities when he winds up the debate, I know that he will do so.

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): I appreciate that my right hon. Friend wants to get on with his speech, but he will understand that considerable concern is being expressed about the future of the amphibious forces. I appreciate that a decision will be taken later this year. However, my right hon. Friend will have seen press reports which suggest that consideration is being given to extending the life of Fearless and Intrepid into the next century and to converting merchant ships to provide a facility for amphibious forces. My right hon. Friend must understand that that would be completely unacceptable to the House.

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend will understand that when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence makes his decision he will want to be able to tell the House that he is suggesting a cost-effective way forward. The evaluation of the various options requires a detailed and expert study within the Department.

Incidentally, the House will be glad to know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, notwithstanding the inevitably great pressures on his timetable, is going to northern Norway next month to see the Royal Navy and Royal Marines amphibious capability for himself. We are grateful for the sustained interest of Members of both Houses in seeing our Arctic warfare training in northern Norway. Ten Members of this House and of another place visited 3 Commando Brigade in Norway last year and another nine will be going next week. I should particularly like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) on her zeal in forsaking the comfort of a hotel bedroom for the delights of the arctic ration pack and a night in the snow with the Royal Marines.

The House is fully aware that the main operational commitment of the Royal Marines is to the United Kingdom-Netherlands amphibious force. The standard of Arctic warfare training that the marines have now achieved through training in Norway each winter is exceptionally impressive. Even the Norwegians now acknowledge that the Royal Marines are as good in the Arctic as they are themselves. Last year we sent a Rapier unit to train with 3 Commando Brigade for the first time, from which many valuable lessons were learnt, including confirmation that the operational performance of Rapier is not degraded by continuous exposure to very low temperatures.

Quite apart from their amphibious landing and Arctic warfare skills, the Royal Marines perform many other valuable operational roles. They have undertaken 26 Northern Ireland tours since 1969. 40 Commando is now making the first Royal Marine deployment to Belize, having carried out a United Nations peace-keeping tour in Cyprus last year.

The Royal Marines also provide units for protecting our offshore oil and gas installations, boarding detachments for the Falkland Islands patrol vessels, an air defence element for the Royal Navy ships in the vicinity of the Gulf, our maritime counter-terrorism capability and an important element of our special forces in the shape of the special boat squadron.

We are indeed most fortunate to have a highly trained and versatile Corps of Royal Marines, with its valuable reserve element, within our naval forces.

The modernisation of our mine countermeasures force continues. Since our last debate one more Hunt class ship has joined the fleet and another will do so shortly, and the last two of this class have been ordered. The first of the Sandown class of single-role mine hunters has also been ordered. Mine hunting with variable-depth sonar and the use of remotely controlled submersibles launched from the mine hunter is the most effective means of neutralising modern Soviet mines in the deeper waters of the continental shelf. We believe that the Sandown ships will be the most capable mine hunters in any western navy.

We are at the same time improving our minesweeping capability with the phasing out of the old Ton class ships and their replacement by the new River class. Nine of the 12 River class minesweepers are now with the fleet. Eleven of these will be operated by the Royal Naval Reserve, with one to be attached to each of the RNR sea training centres at Belfast, London, Bristol, Southampton, Dundee, Glasgow, Cardiff, Newcastle, Brighton, Edinburgh and Liverpool. In addition, the new class of patrol craft being built exclusively for the reserves and the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service should all be operational by this autumn.

These new orders have given a tremendous boost to the RNR which, for the first time since the second world war, now has a class of warships to operate itself. We are confident that the RNR and the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service, both of which are being expanded, will discharge their important responsibilities most effectively.

In relation to merchant shipping, we have said previously that the size of the British flagged merchant marine in the particular categories of ships that we require for defence purposes was such that we could discharge our NATO obligations, with the exception of stern trawlers for minesweeping. I am glad to say that we believe that we have found a satisfactory alternative way of meeting the minesweeping requirment by using North sea support ships. With the Department of Transport we are continuing to monitor very closely the potential availability of merchant ships for defence purposes into the early 1990s.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): How will troops be transported to Europe in moments of heightened tension when the Channel tunnel is built and the number of ferries in service in the English channel diminishes?

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to paragraph 43 of the White Paper on the Channel fixed link which was published this week. It states:

> "After carefully considering projections of the tonnage of total UK-flag cross-Channel fleet in relation to its existing level, the Government has concluded that there will still be sufficient ferry capactiy to fulfil our defence requirements".

Sir Edward du Cann (Taunton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the serious and most carefully considered opinion of many people in the House and elsewhere, the Minister's statement that he believes that our merchant marine is adequate in time of war to reinforce the Navy is simply not justified by the facts? Many hon. Members are immensely concerned about that matter. Will my right hon. Friend please bear this view in mind?

Mr. Stanley: I stress to my right hon. Friend that I am talking about the requirements for merchant shipping for

[Mr. Stanley]

defence purposes which is a fairly restricted area of needs to be called on in wartime. That matter has been the subject of detailed study by the Select Committee on Defence which had full access to the classified information about our requirements and the availability of ships. If my right hon. Friend examines the Select Committee's response on that matter, he will find that its response does not reflect the view he expressed.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I believe that the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) is correct. There is general concern throughout the country that the merchant fleet is declining. There is anxiety that the fleet has declined to such an extent that it cannot fulfil the total commitments that are required for all our defence requirements, not just our NATO obligations.

Mr. Stanley: I appreciate and understand that concern but I return to the basic point that we have carried out a very careful analysis which was virtually a ship-by-ship requirement analysis of the defence requirements. Those requirements are quite separate from the wider requirements to maintain the economy in time of war, which is not a matter for the Ministry of Defence, but a matter for the Department of Transport. That raises a much wider issue. However, for specific, clear, defence requirements, we carried out a very careful analysis and I repeat what I said at the Dispatch Box—that, with the exception of the position on stern trawlers, for which we have an alternative, we are satisfied that we can meet our NATO obligations.

Since the last Navy debate, the Fleet Air Arm has taken delivery of nine more Sea Harriers and 16 new helicopters have been ordered. The helicopters comprise nine Sea King mark 4s, which will update the Fleet Air Arm's commando lift capability, and also seven Lynx mark 3s, which will be a valuable addition to the fleet's offensive capability. Work on the EH 101 with the Italians is progressing well.

Naval flying, both fixed wing and helicopters, is one of the most exacting tasks in the armed services. The standards that have to be maintained consistently by both ground and air crews are extraordinarily high. It is to the Fleet Air Arm's great credit that such standards are maintained.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): As my right hon. Friend the Minister is dealing with helicopters, he must be aware that HMS Brazen is nigh unto Westminster at present. That is a splendid ship and has a helicopter on board. It does, however, have a capacity for two helicopters. I hope that my right hon. Friend will ensure that future type 22 ships and existing ships of this class will have the additional capability and are equipped with two helicopters.

Mr. Stanley: My hon. and learned Friend is quite correct. The type 22 does have the capability to carry two Lynx helicopters, and that is obviously an important potential operational enhancement. My hon. and learned Friend will understand that the situation in peacetime is not necessarily that which would apply in wartime. By having the additional physical capability on the type 22, we can increase the helicopter capabilty in wartime. It is not at the moment our intention in peacetime to put two Lynx helicopters on the type 22.

I come last, but by no means least, to the underwater navy. In 1986 we expect to order a total of five submarines, which will be the largest number of submarines ordered in a single year since 1963. Four were ordered last month—the first three follow-on orders of the new Upholder class of conventional submarines, together with the seventh Trafalgar class nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarine. The Navy now has 14 SSNs in the fleet, with a further four on order. We expect to place the order for the first Trident submarine in the next few months.

It is absolutely clear from the detailed and expert work carried out within the Government—and reflected in non-classified form in the open Government documents—that the only option that Britain has for maintaining an effective deterrent is Trident. The supposedly cut-price alternative deterrents that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, (Dr. Owen) invariably comes forward with on these occasions—such as putting cruise missiles on to this and that and so on—would not give us an effective strategic deterrent.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The right hon. Gentleman should look at the US navy.

Mr. Stanley: The right hon. Gentleman mentions the US navy. He knows perfectly well that that particular deployment is not the primary strategic capability of the US navy. If he had discussions with the US navy, he would know that, if they were in the same position as us—being able to choose only between a ballistic and a cruise system—the US navy and the US Defence Secretary would choose the ballistic route.

If there was a sensible, cheaper alternative, we would have bought it. There is not, and the right hon. Gentleman is simply kidding himself when he claims that there is. It is also absolutely clear that no equivalent expenditure on conventional equipment can produce a fraction of the contribution of deterrence that Trident represents.

No protection whatever is afforded against strategic nuclear blackmail, or worse, by any number of frigates, any number of tanks and any number of tactical aircraft. The idea that expenditure on conventional capability is any substitute in defence terms for expenditure on nuclear capability is pure illusion. Conventional expenditure may be an alternative; it is certainly not a satisfactory substitute. But it does seem from what was said last week that the Opposition are not even in the business of increasing conventional spending as an alternative to spending on the British nuclear deterrent.

When asked last week by my hon and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) whether the Labour party would use the money from Trident to strengthen conventional forces, the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) gave a very significant answer. He said:

> "We have made it clear that we will abolish Trident. We have also made it clear that, without Trident, it will be possible to maintain conventional defence spending at present levels."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 1126.]

In other words, all that the Opposition are committing themselves to is the possibility—not even the certainty, just the possibility—that conventional defence spending will merely be maintained at its present level even after they have done away with Britain's deterrent.

Clearly the Opposition have concluded that the present level of conventional spending is satisfactory. In the light of that, they have no justification to call in this debate, or any other, for more ship orders or more spending on the conventional Navy. Their policies clearly would not produce either.

The Royal Navy enters 1986 in good shape. The Government have spent about £3 billion more in real terms on the Navy than if expenditure had been kept at the level that applied when those who sit on the Opposition Benches were in office. The fleet is well balanced. It has good ships' programmes and much-improved ships' capabilities. The men and women of the senior service are of high calibre and strong commitment, as are the civilians who support them. They do both their service and our country proud.

6 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): We last debated the Royal Navy on 29 November 1984, and many of the phrases we have heard uttered by the Minister were used on that occasion as well. It is obvious that the MOD's word processor has a fairly large memory bank. The previous debate came within a period when there was still the prospect of 3 per cent. per annum increases in real expenditure. It came within the last year of that period, but there was still the belief on the Government's part that everything would turn out for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Although Westland did not appear as one of the hazards in Voltaire's "Candide", certainly Doctor Pangloss's optimism was reflected in the calculations of the previous Secretary of State for Defence when it came to spending on defence, especially on the Navy. The objectives were quite clear to him. He believed that it would be possible to maintain fortress Falklands in the south Atlantic as well as other out-of-area commitments. It was to be possible to sustain the Nimrod programme, for example, and to finance the ever-increasing Trident programme. It was to be possible to keep at sea a 50-warship navy and to fund what might almost be described as diversions such as the torpedo programme in varying shapes and forms. All that was to be achieved within existing budgets, with the one caveat that if the Trident programme became very expensive something somewhere in the budget would have to be cut.

We were told that there would be no need for any defence reviews, that no additional funding would be available, and that that would not be possible in any event. We were told that if there were any problems, Mr. Levene would arrive with one of his gimmicks and produce the necessary savings. Many of us believe that if Mr. Levene is to justify his salary, he will have to be an alchemist rather than a business man. That will be necessary if he is to find anything like the resources that will be required. We have heard talk of 10 per cent. savings across the procurement budget but that is a remote possibility.

The half-baked proposals to privatise and contractorise the royal naval dockyards have not commended themselves to anyone except the zealots on the Government Front Bench. I realise that the proposed legislation is still in Committee. I have never been in a Committee room in which so few speeches have been made in support of the Government's proposed legislation. I remember the Second Reading debate when the Government Whips had difficulty in dragging Conservative Members into the Chamber to give the Bill unqualified support. That is to question the loyalty and the support of Conservative Back Benchers for the Government's policies.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Has the hon. Gentleman asked the Royal Navy whether it is keen on the Government's proposals for the dockyards? If he consults engineering officers and those who serve in the Royal Navy in the dockyards, he will find that they are delighted by the proposals that are set out in the Bill that is now in Committee.

Mr. O'Neill: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's intervention is that much depends upon those to whom we speak. Those to whom I have spoken show no enthusiasm for the Bill. They are worried about their prospects and what they see as uncertainties. That worry is not confined to their self-interest in employment. It extends to the quality of the work that will be carried out when set against that which has been undertaken in the dockyards and the service that the Royal Navy has received over the years.

The primary purpose of privatising or contractorising the dockyards was to save money. No body of any standing in the House, either in the shape of the Public Accounts Committee or the Select Committee on Defence, has been impressed by the arguments advanced by the MOD. The PAC is normally a fairly restrained body when it comes to submitting its conclusions, but it regarded the evidence put forward by the MOD to support its case as being among the weakest, the most inadequate and insubstantial of that with which it had been presented. We cannot look for substantial savings in that area, even within the modest targets that the Ministry has set itself, before the end of the decade.

The newly appointed Secretary of State is not in his place and we are aware that he is still reading through the files. We might not be getting a full-blown defence review, but something is stirring in the undergrowth. We have heard already of the Cabinet's willingness to consider alternatives to Nimrod. The American journal entitled *Aviation Week and Space Technology* has been explicit. It has stated that

"Studies indicate that Britain could purchase about six E-3A aircraft"—

that is with AWACS—

"or a greater number of E-2C's for the same amount it would require to get the 11 Nimrod AEW aircraft".

There is quite specific talk about the options that are available and these issues will probably be raised in the forthcoming debate on the Royal Air Force. There is widespread discussion of the relative merits of the available options.

Within hours of being in the job, the newly appointed Secretary of State for Defence concluded that he could not continue with the level of commitment that the Government had set themselves within existing budgets. The latest public expenditure figures have suggested that there will be cuts of 5 per cent. in the budget over the next three years. If we were to assume that the Falklands expenditure was to be included, the figure would increase to about 7 to 8 per cent. If we were at the same time to take account of the fact that defence inflation is always about 1 to 2 per cent. in excess of the normal rates of inflation, we would be likely to see a 3 per cent. cut in real terms every year over the next three years in defence spending.

[Mr. O'Neill]

The Minister has described—this is how he would put it—the number of hulls and the improvement in capability. I do not know whether he has been able to convince any of his right hon. and hon. Friends on that score. I know that some of my hon. Friends will be seeking the opportunity to put some searching questions to him and to obtain some rather more specific answers than those which he has given so far.

I am sure that we all welcome the fact that the Government have not reneged on their promise that the second type 23 would go to Swan Hunter. We are grateful for that. However, we are cynical, perhaps, in remembering that when the Defence Estimates were published in 1985, a significant gap was the omission of any announcement of tenders for type 23s. At the press conference at which the Estimates were introduced, the Secretary of State stated that three new type 23s would be ordered in the course of the year, according to Mr. Desmond Wettern, the naval correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. He is a man who should know, as the Minister has said. He certainly seems to have enough to write about and he seems to be the recipient of authorised or unauthorised leaks that are not investigated by the head of the Civil Service. In their own way, they are just as significant as some of those which are subject to his scrutiny. Having bounced the type 23s into this year's Defence Estimates we now find that they will be bounced into next year's Defence Estimates. If we live in hope, we shall doubtless have some prospect of a type 23 eventually.

My hon. Friends representing Tyneside constituencies will be trying to get in because they are anxious to give full vent to the bitterness and sense of betrayal felt by the shipyard workers on the Tyne. At the time of the Falklands war they were national heroes but they are now part of the forgotten army of the north.

About eight frigates are currently being built, four being replacements for ships lost during the Falklands war. By 1990 one third of the 51 warships in the Navy will be more than 25 years old. The Minister did not say, but perhaps the Under-Secretary of State could be a little more specific and tell us how many of the ships which will be more than 25 years old by 1990 will benefit from the improvements in capability to which the Minister referred in his opening remarks. Will he also confirm that if the ordering rate is not increased dramatically there will be no way in which we can maintain the standard of our fleet which we believe to be our rightful contribution to the Alliance? For the past five years an average of one ship each year has been ordered. That rate will have to be trebled if we are to maintain our commitment to the Alliance and provide our men with craft that are commensurate with their skills and loyalty to the service.

Mr. Sayeed: If the Labour party form the next Government will the hon. Gentleman say how many ships they will order, of what type and with what frequency?

Mr. O'Neill: The answer to that is simple. We cannot make any commitments until we know the ordering priorities of the Government. At present it is clear that the Government have no idea and a Government coming into power, as we will in 1987 or 1988, will have to wait to see the state of the Navy at that time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): That was a clever reply but it dodges the main issue. Has the hon. Gentleman anything to add or will he confirm the statement made by his right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) in the debate on the Army last week when he said:

"by cancelling Trident, we can maintain present levels of conventional defence spending." [*Official Report*, 30 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 1127.]

Mr. O'Neill: I have nothing to add. My right hon. Friend said that following the cancellation of the independent nuclear deterrent and the decommissioning of Polaris we shall sustain our commitment to a conventional force.

I want to raise the matter of submarines. The Minister sought to claim some credit for the ordering of submarines. I can well imagine the satisfaction felt in Merseyside and Barrow-in-Furness over the orders that have been placed. The prospects for Scott Lithgow and the Clyde are worrying. Unless more submarines are ordered quickly the prospects are that that yard will have to close and it is unlikely that it will be able to open again. It is a yard which has a tremendous expertise in that area and it would be a great loss, not only for the economy of that part of Scotland but to the engineering capabilities of the United Kingdom, if it were to be blighted simply because the previous Secretary of State had some emotional commitment to Merseyside from his days at the Department of the Environment.

I realise that there is now a new Secretary of State and it may be that he will look more favourably on that part of the United Kingdom. One can only hope for that. In *Jane's Defence Weekly* it was suggested today that there may be a possibility of a conversion order on the Atlantic Causeway and that it might go to Scott Lithgow. Perhaps the Minister could comment on that because *Jane's Defence Weekly* is a reasonably reliable source and is one which occasionally expresses the inner thinking of the Ministry of Defence. It would be useful if that rumour could be scotched or confirmed.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow-in-Furness): I understand the comments of the hon. Gentleman regarding the prospects for Scott Lithgow. Is he not aware that the official policy of the Labour party will mean the devastation of the shipyards in Barrow?

Mr. O'Neill: It is not the policy of the Labour party to achieve that and it is certainly not the view of Mr. Rodney Leach of Vickers. When I met him earlier this year he was happy with the assurances which I gave on behalf of the Labour party that on the basis of cancelling Trident there would still be sufficient work. If the hon. Gentleman read his local newspaper he would find that that was well covered at the time of my visit. It may be that he was out of the constituency on that day and did not read it but the management of Vickers has been assured by the statements of the Labour party.

Miss Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake) *rose*——

Mr. O'Neill: I will not give way. There are many people who want to speak. If the Government are committed to giving the submarine orders to Cammell Laird and Vickers it may be to help and protect those areas but it could simply be to fatten them up before privatisation. The Labour party recognises the Government's need to get as much money as possible out

of the privatising ventures which they are trying to carry out. Whether that money will be reflected in the Defence budget is another matter. I doubt it.

The subject of Westland will continue to come up in one shape or form and there was a reference to the hovercraft capabilities of that firm. It has been drawn to our attention that if the Minister or the Secretary of State had been as concerned about sustaining the orders for Westland as they were about sustaining one form or another of ownership, some of the problems that confront that firm may not have been as great. Will the Minister perhaps give us some idea on the question of additional helicopter orders? We welcome the statement about the orders that are currently in train, but I am led to believe that there is a possibility of about another 14 that could be ordered by way of commando and anti-submarine Sea King helicopters. Do the Government have any plans to increase their amphibious capability? Would they consider other uses for hovercraft and the like to help firms such as Westland which need assistance and which have products that the services could make use of?

The Minister made reference to the efforts of the men and women in the services and we echo his sentiments and congratulations on their sterling work in the Gulf and the evacuation role they played some weeks ago. However, some of us remember the great rebellion on the Conservative Benches last summer when the generals, admirals and vice-marshals received a rise of 17·6 per cent. more than the judges and the civil servants. The irony was that while those people had to be given the money to be kept in the job not many of them were actually leaving to go elsewhere. However, that is not the picture with the middle-ranking officers.

There seems to be a great deal of dissatisfaction in the Navy not only about rates of pay but conditions. In common with other parts of the public service, more and more is demanded of the armed services, and this is having a detrimental effect on morale. The Navy is short of officers by about 10 per cent., and the air crew for the Harrier jump jets is about 30 per cent. short of the full complement. There is a shortage of principal war officers to staff the ships' operations rooms and the like.

In the debate on the Army, my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) raised the question of overseas allowances. He pointed out the Government's parsimony — on the one hand, they were increasing allowances but, on the other, they were increasing charges, which affected morale in the British Army on the Rhine. Some hon. Members may not be aware of one problem in the Navy. On the surface, the Bridport bus syndrome may seem to be a petty problem. Because the distance between Plymouth and Portsmouth via Bridport is less than 200 miles, expenses cannot be claimed for the trip. Serving officers are required to make a long journey at their own expense to take training courses. That is unreasonable. It may not be a major issue, but it is one of the gripes and grievances of men whose loyalty is beyond question. They should not have to be troubled by the Government's petty parsimony.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: I said that I would not give way.

Mr. Viggers: It is an important point.

Mr. O'Neill: I give way, on this point.

Mr. Viggers: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because this is a matter of great significance to my constituents. How dare the hon. Gentleman on behalf of the Labour party criticise this Government when the Labour Government in 1978 held down the pay of the armed forces by 32 per cent., which meant that the Conservative Government's first action was to increase pay by 32 per cent? Will the hon. Gentleman bear in mind that those people who suffered under the previous pay holdback are still suffering through their pensions? Is the hon. Gentleman not ashamed of that?

Mr. O'Neill: I recognise the validity of the hon. Gentleman's point. At that time, the Labour Government required sacrifices from many groups, not just the services. At the present time, many people not in the services are doing very well. One of the reasons so many people in the services are leaving and taking jobs elsewhere is that salaries outside the services are so attractive. Their training and skills would be of far greater assistance to Britain if they remained in the services. The Government must take account of the fact that the resignation rate in the services is approaching the level described earlier. We are coming full circle on this issue. We are now reaching the stage when the services regard the Government with the same distaste as they regarded the Labour Government.

We welcome the orders that have finally been placed for Sting Ray. We should have liked the Minister of State to be a little more forthcoming on the issue of Spearfish, the cost of the programme and the possibility of obtaining co-operation with other countries with a view to defraying expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) may raise this and related procurement matters.

I do not believe that the Minister satisfied any hon. Member with respect to the merchant fleet. He fudged the issue. To suggest that a study, which was carried out solely to meet the needs of the Ministry of Defence, was valid at a time when the Ministry of Transport will be chasing after the same craft to fulfil other related functions is almost to mislead the House. That is not good enough. I think that there is unanimity on this matter. In 1975, there were 1,600 British owned and registered ships; in 1986, we have 640. In 1975, there were 81,000 officers and ratings in the Merchant Navy; in 1986, we have 33,700. Such decreases are a national disgrace and should not be viewed with the complacency the Minister showed.

The Minister told us that there had been a working party report. I understand that many of its points will be rebutted in the next few weeks by a publication produced by the Maritime League. Those of us who are members of the maritime group in the House will await the working party's detailed examination with interest. I do not think that the report will in any way support the Minister's complacency. If we are to have an adequate response in a time of crisis, we must look to the Merchant Navy for assistance. It is an essential part of our defence arrangements.

In my speech I have placed more emphasis on procurement than on any other strategy. At the heart of the Opposition's case is the fact that the Government's commitment to the grandiose, irrelevant and increasingly dangerous independent nuclear deterrent is forcing the rest of the Navy to carry out its duties with aging craft and out-of-date equipment, supplied by industries that are ready to

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provide some of the best craft in the world but are denied continuity of orders and the assurances that they will get the work for which they have tendered.

The Government have succeeded in pleasing no one with their naval policies. To fund orders for Trident, other orders have been half called for and then cancelled. Creative accounting techniques are being adopted to keep certain aspects of expenditure down. We have areas of high unemployment where people have the skills and capabilities to provide support for the Navy, as they have done in previous years, but those skills are being lost to the country because the Government do not have the guts to face up to reality. We are now a medium nation with limited economic capabilities. We have neither the right nor the means to carve for ourselves the role that the Minister sought to advance.

6.27 pm

Sir Edward du Cann (Taunton): It is good to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in his place. I hope that he will allow me as an old friend, because we served together in the Territorial Army during a period that we much enjoyed and look back on with nostalgia, to wish him every success in his new responsibilities. Providing he keeps a flow of money coming to the Royal Navy in ever-increasing amounts, he will certainly have no trouble from me.

It may be within the recollection of hon. Members that in the past few years I have raised the subject of hydrography in these Navy debates a dozen times. I regret the need to do so again. Paragraph 4.21 of the second report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology entitled "Marine Science and Technology", which was published in the 1985-86 Session, states:

"there was criticism of the failure to develop a coherent policy to survey, exploit and manage the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone".

That is followed by a series of references to evidence taken by the Select Committee. The report continues:

"existing knowledge of the UK EEZ was by no means complete . . . the Hydrographer"—

of the Navy—

"commented that only 15·7 per cent. of the UK Continental Shelf was considered by hydrographers to be properly surveyed, a figure which was increasing . . . at only 1-2 per cent. per annum".

I do not know what the opinion of the House may be about that clear view. Mine is simple and simply put. I applaud what my right hon. Friend had to say in his excellent speech about increased expenditure on maritime matters, but it is surely a scandal that, seemingly through carelessness, we do not afford the comparatively trivial funds necessary to survey our home waters thoroughly. The potential for riches in and under the sea is unlimited, as the discovery of oil in our waters has evidenced.

By failing to co-ordinate research — that is the report's theme, and it is well worth careful study—and failing to research in our own backyard, so to speak, we betray the tradition of Cook, Beaufort and other great navigators of whom the contemporary Navy is so rightly proud.

Future generations will condemn our contemporary indifference. We are becoming a nation of non-decision and non-doers. In that respect, speaking of the hydrographic fleet, I hope that we shall soon hear something about the replacement for Endurance.

That is not the only failure. I come to the chief matter which I wish to raise—the fourth arm of our defence, referred to by my right hon. Friend and by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). I can put my point in one sentence. It is an urgent matter. The serious decline in Britain's merchant fleet now puts our defence and our economy in deadly peril. The answer to the point that my right hon. Friend made in his reply to the intervention that he was good enough to allow me to make is that this country's defence and commercial maritime interests are wholly indissoluble. Underlining almost all the United Kingdom's trading activities is an inescapable maritime link, the most important element of which is merchant shipping. The British merchant fleet, and many other important elements, are now in such sharp decline — that is the point that the hon. Member for Clackmannan was making — that they face possible extinction within the next few years. The process is not a self-correcting one. It can only worsen if present policies are allowed to continue. We have it in our power to arrest the decline, to safeguard and create employment in our society and to enhance our defence capability. That is what I wish to argue for.

I have such respect for my right hon. Friend that I regret to have to make these points, but I am glad to make them in the presence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The complacency of the Government and Ministers in this most serious situation is astounding. The hon. Member for Clackmannan referred to the great Dr. Pangloss of whom Francois-Marie Arouet—Monsieur de Voltaire, the phoney philosopher—wrote, and who said that everything was

"for the best in the best of possible worlds."

As my right hon. Friend said, we have had a report —no doubt most carefully worked on in his Department —but if ever a report was Panglossian, that was it. I give him an immediate answer to the point that he was making, after my intervention and that of my hon. Friends, if he believes that our merchant shipping capability is adequate for our defence needs. I shall give him one example of the way that it plainly is not. The whole House knows it is not. We could not mount another Falklands operation today. We do not have the ships.

What are the facts? As the House is aware, and as the hon. Member for Clackmannan said, 10 years ago there were 1,600 ships of 500 gross registered tonnes and upwards on the British register. Today, the number is not the 640 that he mentioned; it is less. It is probably only 600, and the number continues to fall. The latest evidence was shown by BP flagging out the other day. What a blow that was for British maritime pride.

The order book for new ships for the British fleet is now at rock bottom—a mere 250,000 tonnes. I have long felt, and often said, that we could have many more ships in the Royal Navy if only we went for simpler and cheaper ships. We often complicate matters of design.

Mr. Best: Hear, hear. The S90.

Sir Edward du Cann: I am much obliged to my hon. Friend.

As a young man in the Navy, in the closing stages of the war I served in what was called a "Woolworth aircraft carrier". How effective were those cheaper ships. They did an extremely good job. We badly need more naval ships. My right hon. and hon. Friends face great difficulty in ordering them because of the expense. We all understand

that. If there were a change of Government, the successor Government would face the same difficulty. That was one aspect of the teasing that went on earlier in the debate. If the designs were simpler and we had cheaper ships, we could undoubtedly have more.

There are no ships in the distant water trawling fleet. I do not know how my right hon. Friend can, with a straight face, quote that report and say that we have an adequate defence capability while we have no ships in the distant water trawling fleet.

If we have fewer ships, other industries suffer. We heard an impassioned comment from the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) about shipbuilding in a question to the Prime Minister earlier today. We see on the tape today that three north-eastern yards are going to amalgamate. We all know of what that is the first stage. One of them will close shortly. That is what that means.

If there are fewer ships, other industries suffer—shipbuilding, ship repairing and those businesses which produce many kinds of marine technology and marine engines. The list of industries is long.

The net contribution to the balance of payments made by United Kingdom-owned ships has fallen by £2 billion over the past 10 years.

Qualified seafarers—a point mentioned by the hon. Member for Clackmannan—have decreased over the same period from about 90,000 to 30,000. Five colleges of nautical education have closed. We are rapidly losing not just our material and financial assets, but our professional people who could do something to restore them.

The defence implications are disturbing for the United Kingdom as well as for NATO. The capacity of our country, if not of Europe, to supply itself in time of war is now in doubt. There is a shortage of ships of all classes — minesweepers, troopers, tankers, general cargo carriers and ships for harbour duties. The list is long.

The manpower reservoir for the Royal Navy is hopelessly inadequate. At the outbreak of war in 1939, there were 140,000 people at sea. The number today is a mere quarter of that figure.

On the economic side, the percentage weight of United Kingdom exports carried by British registered ships has fallen to about one quarter of the total. If we take the tonne-mile figure, it is now below 20 per cent.—less than one fifth of the whole. That means that the bulk of the United Kingdom trade—and the overwhelmingly greatest proportion of it by weight, 98 per cent. or so, goes by sea—is in the hands of our competitors. I do not know the view of right hon. and hon. Gentlemen, but I regard that as an intolerable and dangerous position. One might ask, what is the point of having a Royal Navy if we have no merchant marine to defend?

There are many reasons for the decline of the British merchant fleet — the worldwide economic recession, changing trade patterns, the misjudgments that have been made, especially about tankers, depressed freight sales, protectionism and a lack of profitability. Right hon. and hon. Gentlemen could no doubt add to that list. I do not think that we would quarrel about any of the matters that we would put into the list.

The main underlying cause for the decline of the British merchant fleet is the impracticability of trading fairly in a market which is no longer governed by economics alone. Competitors will do anything to survive when far too many ships are chasing too little cargo.

This debate is primarily concerned with the military threat to the United Kingdom and our NATO allies. The commercial threat is equally important. It was Nye Bevan in a much quoted phrase who said, "Why look in the crystal when you can read the book?" That is the declared intention of those who threaten us commercially to force us beyond the point of recovery. Read the proceedings of the International Marine Conference in Peking in 1984 or the reports from the shipbuilding industry in South Korea in 1983. Our competitors in the free world seek to destroy our civilian maritime capacity, and that is a fact.

In the admirable speech of my right hon. Friend at the beginning of the debate we heard of the immense increase in the activities of the Communists in maritime affairs. My right hon. Friend was saying: look at the expansion in their merchant fleet, look at the expansion in their fishing fleets, and so on. We are under attack, therefore, from both sides —from those who should be our friends as well as those who are opposed to us politically and ideologically—and what do we do? Every right hon. and hon. Member knows what the answer to that question is: we do nothing.

The time has come for action. We face an emergency. It is time that we had and announced a national maritime policy; it is time that we had a declaration of interest at the highest political level. What should we say? We should say that Britain recognises how vital is her maritime trading system. We should say that we intend to safeguard what we have, not let it slide away still further, and to develop it. That involves co-ordination, of course.

I thought it was very interesting that in my right hon. Friend's speech at one moment, on the subject of the merchant marine, he said, "Oh, well, you see, all that would be a matter for the Department of Transport". That is just the trouble—divided responsibility. There are 14 different Departments concerned with maritime affairs and a multiplicity of organisations outside the business of government.

I suggest to the House in all seriousness that we need a single Minister who will be responsible for evolving policy. He might set himself these priorities: to make a thorough assessment of our defence needs in terms of ocean-going and coastal merchant shipping, and then to harness support within the European Community. There is not much sign of that at the moment. I thought that one of the great advantages of going into Europe was that we could all act together and come together. Here is Europe, this great trading block, vastly bigger than the United States, much bigger than Japan, for instance, and we seem to be fighting one another. We have plenty of muscle and no common practices.

Why do we not make a start with coastal shipping and cabotage instead of having a whole series of different organisations and permitting, as we do, ships from other countries in Europe to do virtually what they like in United Kingdom waters while we are precluded from trading successfully in theirs?

I would mobilise the European countries and international support in order to see that excess tonnage is scrapped and that we return, so far as we can, to normal economic criteria in the market place. I would seek to harness all the talent and research resources that we have in the United Kingdom so that this single co-ordinating Minister could be helped in his task.

I would take as a firm objective the profitable operation of merchant shipping in private hands. The industry has put up some excellent suggestions to the Chancellor for

[Sir Edward du Cann]

fiscal measures which would be of great help in his forthcoming Budget. I hope that they will have the support of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Defence, additional ship allowances, rollover relief, and so on. There is a window of opportunity at the moment through which it would be easily possible for British ship owners to purchase second-hand ships. The market is very much in their favour for doing that. It would be a pity to let the opportunity slip.

One could continue with a list of items which it is possible to do. The fact is that the present situation is intolerable and the reality is that there is no earthly need for us to tolerate it. I believe that it would easily be possible to mount a series of constructive proposals which could transform the present situation from being a hopeless one into one which contained a new degree of hope.

If I may, I will quote from the humble address of the Commons to the Sovereign, Queen Anne, in 1708:

"Other nations which were formerly great and powerful at sea, have, by negligence and mismanagement, lost their trade and seen their maritime strength entirely ruined. Therefore we do, in the most earnest manner, beseech your Majesty that the Sea Affair may be always your first and most peculiar care".

Plus ça change—those words are as relevant today as they were 277 years ago.

I beseech my right hon. Friend to realise the peril that we are in—"peril" is a word I use advisedly—from the defence and from the economic point of view, confident in him, as I am in his new, proud office, urgently to take those measures that are necessary and possible to improve and to restore the situation to what it should be.

6.46 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): I agree with every word that the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) has stated about the dire peril facing our merchant marine. I hope that the new Secretary of State, whom I wish well, will reflect on the views that the right hon. Gentleman has expressed because I think that they are widely held, not just on both sides of the House, but throughout the country.

The Secretary of State deserves our congratulations, but he also deserves our sympathies. I do not think that anybody has ever taken over the job of the Secretary of State with such a number of postponed decisions and facing such a very difficult financial squeeze. There are many reasons, of course, why the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is no longer in the Government, but certainly he was going to face some politically very difficult questions.

I am not sure how clearly right hon. and hon. Conservative Members have realised what is happening to the defence budget. After all, until November last year, we were still hearing pledges about the defence budget being held to "level funding", yet we now discover in January 1986 that the Secretary of State for Defence will have to make do in the coming year with a defence budget that will be further cut. Between now and 1998-99 we are to see the equivalent in real terms of a 7 per cent. cut in the defence budget. That is on some very optimistic inflationary assumptions. If one looks at the problems in the Secretary of State's in tray, one sees, just to name a few, the Nimrod airborne early warning system—a very difficult decision which now faces the Secretary of State, postponed by his predecessor. Next is the question of the amphibious forces. Many of us are simply not prepared for us not to have an amphibious lift capability, for which there is a continuing argument. Yet the Minister of State confirmed that there will be no early decision. Then there is the question of fortress Falklands which is costing us £52 million in 1985-86 and is estimated to cost £192 million in 1988-89. On top of that, as the right hon. Member for Taunton said, there is the question of the replacement of HMS Endurance. Then there is the question of agency management in the dockyard, to which I shall return, which will cost the Navy more money over the next few years—these very difficult years in which we are adding to the budget. The Minister of State hopes that in the longer term it will produce economies. I have great doubts about this. However, it is an additional cost. On top of that, we have Trident—the cuckoo in the nest.

I shall now deal with the inflationary assumptions that may face the Secretary of State. The Government are assuming that in 1986-87 the Armed Services Pay Review Board will suggest an average pay increase of 4 per cent. If it suggests a 5 per cent. pay rise, it will add about £200 million to the defence budget, which is 1 per cent. above the assumption. It must be remembered that people will make many comments about the problem of morale, especially in the middle ranks. A 10 per cent. sterling depreciation against the dollar in 1986-87, which nobody can rule out, will add £300 million to the real terms cost of Trident.

The Secretary of State will have to make some unpalatable decisions, especially as the new fighter aircraft, which is the result of a welcome European procurement decision, is not even included in the long-term costings and must now be absorbed. I hope that the Secretary of State will examine Trident, and that his decision not to announce the Trident order today, which many people expected to be made in January, means that he is reconsidering Trident. Given the Conservative party's commitments, that is an extremely difficult decision for a new Secretary of State to make.

Many people throughout the country and a growing number in the armed services who want Britain to retain nuclear weapons, as I do, and believe that we should contribute to the European nuclear deterrent honestly believe that Trident is not affordable. I have never denied that it is a brilliant system, and I am glad that the United States has it, but I call in aid the recent change of position of the editor of *Jane's Fighting Ships*. He now calls into question the cursory look given to submarine-launched cruise missiles. He says that submarines would be brought too close inshore, and would not have the obvious advantage of being 3,000 miles out to sea. He says of the outer Hebrides, the waters of the south Norwegian sea and the North sea:

"Anybody who has carried out operations either in, or in pursuit of a submarine in the confused waters which can be found in all those places might suggest that detection and destruction are by no means easy. If, as the essay says, the cruise missile is vulnerable to Soviet defensive systems, this, presumably, is true of the land-based version and calls into question the efficacy of those now being emplaced in Europe. These, indeed, are not classified as 'strategic' missiles but today too many are inclined to dismiss 'mere kilo-tonnage'."

It is essential that we hold a minimum deterrent, and it is right that we should consider submarine-launched cruise missiles, which are extensively deployed in both the United States and Soviet navies.

Mr. Stanley: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one cannot operationally combine in the same SSN an attack role and a deterrent role? If he accepts that, will he tell the House how many dedicated SSNs for the carriage of a British submarine-launched cruise missile system our country would need to provide a credible deterrent to the Soviet Union, and what it would cost?

Dr. Owen: The right hon. Gentleman is making the great mistake of trying to mirror the Trident system. It is not necessary to have a completely dedicated submarine system, and neither the United States navy nor the Soviet navy has one. They have a mix, which is right. The dedicated submarine increases the costs substantially.

The British deterrent is a contribution to NATO, and is in place, first, for political reasons with the operation of the French, and, secondly, for use, if NATO frayed at the edges, the United States pulled back and there were major questions about the nuclear guarantee. In that case it would be possible to change the deterrent, give it a more dedicated commitment, and to pull out some conventional armament. We would have warning of the break-up of NATO, but we would have insufficient warning to start laying down new submarines and systems. A minimum deterrent means that one is not getting the best, but is saving money.

Mr. Gorbachev's proposals have produced a dramatic change in the Soviet arms control position. Instead of being deeply hostile to the French and the British nuclear deterrents, the Soviets have accepted that missiles with a range over 1,000 kms will be held by the French and the British into the second stage of the disarmament proposals, which they have advocated. They regard it as a quid pro quo for them rejecting the part of the zero option that required them to take SS20s targeted on China and Japan out of Asia, Therefore, at least there is now a degree of symmetry in the Soviet position. The Soviets have accepted the need for a European-based nuclear deterrent, although they want America to remove all its land-based missiles in return for them removing all SS20s from a line beyond the Urals which has already been agreed in the arms control negotiations. That is a significant and major change, and Britain should now be talking to the Soviet Union about the issue, as well as to our American allies and, particularly, the French. We have a new opportunity to reach a broad agreement to replace Polaris with an equivalent level of megatonnage and of deterrence; and not to opt for the staggering increase in megatonnage and warheads that is so critical. That must be faced, and is an important part of arms control and disarmament.

Resources will be necessary if we are to maintain the nuclear submarine build rate, for which the Minister, rightly, claims some credit. I am pleased at the conventionally powered submarine build rate, and at the emphasis on submarines, which are the most crucial part of a modern navy. Moreover, the Royal Navy can make a unique contribution to NATO with its submarines. We need role specialisation within NATO, and it is natural for the United Kingdom to emphasise its maritime wing. If we could share roles, it may be possible slowly to reduce our contribution to BAOR with the agreement of our allies so that we can devote more resources to our naval and maritime role.

Unfortunately, I shall not be present when the Minister replies, so I shall not take up too much time. The Secretary of State is present, has legislation in Committee, and knows the position of the SDP which has been ably put by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) in Committee, and of the Labour party. It is clear from reading the Committee records that the Government will not give way on two fundamental points. First, they will take the dockyards out of the Civil Service. I bitterly regret that decision and think that it is a poor way of repaying dockyard workers for their years of dedicated service. Secondly, it is also perfectly clear that the Government will create a commercial company. I beg the Secretary of State to review the agency management proposal of his predecessor. I know of no one who believes that an enterprise the size of Devonport dockyard, let alone Rosyth dockyard, can be run, if it is split in two, with the Ministry of Defence owning the capital assets and a private management agency employing the men on a contract of only seven years. The Government have never in any of their privatisation measures put in jeopardy the contracts of employment of the workers, and limited it to seven years. Workers at British Telecom, British Gas and the rest have the normal expectation that if they work reasonably well, they will have a job until retirement. The seven year contract of employment for dockyard workers is a ludicrous and savage way of repaying them for their years of loyalty. It does not make industrial sense. Many private industrialists have criticised this agency management scheme. I know of none who thinks it a sensible idea. Independent consultants who have advised Plymouth city council have come out against the idea of the separation of capital from management and employees.

If the Secretary of State for Defence cannot change and has to go ahead with the commercial plc, then at least let it be an integrated corporation, with the majority shareholding owned by the Ministry of Defence. The shares could be quoted and the management and the work force could buy shares. There should be one unified enterprise and the agency management scheme should be ditched.

If the Secretary of State for Defence did this or expressed a readiness to do this, perhaps after the Committee stages, he would be surprised at the co-operation he would get from the trade union movement. He would be surprised at the extent to which it would be prepared to look at the practices and to contribute. It does not like any of the proposals—which is understandable —but it deeply fears this proposal of separating out management and employment from capital. The trade unions know how often the dockyards have scrimped and saved in the past. They fear for its efficiency and its capacity to compete. The Devonport dockyard is prepared to compete on even and equal terms but it needs to be given the unity of an integrated enterprise.

The Secretary of State for Defence earned quite a reputation for himself as Secretary of State for Scotland for his open-mindedness. I therefore hope he will reassess the whole position. If he does so the Royal Navy will be grateful because it will not have its best interests served by the agency management proposal. There are a good many of us who fear the consequences of the present reorganisation at Devonport dockyard. If the Secretary of State was to rethink, he would earn a great deal of respect from many people who have worked in the dockyard a lifetime and who wish to continue to contribute to the maintenance of the fleet and in service to the Royal Navy. They are prepared to make changes in work practice and become more efficient but they want to see some give and

[Dr. Owen]

understanding from the Government on an issue of fundamental importance for themselves. It is of fundamental importance for my constituency and the city of Plymouth.

7.1 pm

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): It is good, sound and accepted parliamentary practice for a Member to declare an interest, if he has one, in the subject matter of a debate. I declare such an interest without any sense of shame—the interest of 12,500 constituents whose livelihoods and those of their families depend upon Navy defence contracts and expenditure. I wish to concentrate my remarks on the relationship of Government defence contracts to employment and employment prospects.

It is pertinent to remind Opposition Members, in particular, in this centenary year of submarine building in Barrow, of the long, close relationship between south-west Cumbria and the Royal Navy—a relationship going back to 1877 when HMS Foxland, the first frigate, was commissioned by the Royal Navy, followed by the first submarine, built for a foreign country, in 1886, the Nordenfelt, and then by the first submarine built for the Royal Navy in 1901, HMS Holland. Since 1901, 297 submarines have been built in Barrow for the Royal Navy.

It is fair to say that the whole economy of south-west Cumbria depends upon naval contracts and especially on submarine building. Yet throughout the whole of the 30-minute speech from the Labour Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), there was not a single grain of comfort nor a single word to reassure the 12,500 people working in Barrow of their continuity of employment should Labour party policy prevail. In response to an intervention to point out this omission, the hon. Gentlenan said:

"I have nothing more to add."

Does he not feel that the largest heavy engineering complex in the United Kingdom deserves better than

"I have nothing more to add."?

Mr. O'Neill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I thought I had made it perfectly clear that we can provide documentary evidence to show, if he is not satisfied that at least the management of Vickers is satisfied, that, in the event of a Labour Government cancelling Trident, work will continue at Barrow and there will be a sufficiency of work to maintain the labour force at its present level.

Mr. Franks: I shall come back to that point. It is a point that I shall certainly not forget because the senior management of Vickers is listening to this debate. What it wants from the Labour Front Bench is not platitudes—it wants specifics.

The Opposition have been hooked for a long time on their commitment to scrap Trident. I do not wish to deal with the strategic implications of that policy, but I remind the Opposition, especially the Labour Front Bench, that Trident is the cornerstone of British and NATO naval defence policy.

The Trident programme is also vital to those constituents in Merseyside and south-west Cumbria whose livelihoods depend on it. Notwithstanding the words of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who opened the debate, for his reassurance, recommitment and reaffirmation of the Trident contract. The Trident programme has already started. The design and the long lead orders are being fulfilled. Currently there are 2,300 of my constituents employed on that programme, and at its peak there will be over 10,000 constituents employed on Trident. What does the Labour party propose as substitute employment for those 10,000 constituents? It is a question that the Labour party has consistently avoided. Labour Front Bench spokesmen continue to come out with platitudes—but platitudes are worthless when jobs are on the line.

No Government have done more for my part of the country than the present Government. We have the commitment to Trident and the work has started. In addition, the Barrow shipyards are currently building four submarines recently ordered by the present Government. The shipyards at Cammell Laird, a subsidiary of Vickers, are building a further three submarines. Those orders represent jobs. Those jobs will take my part of the country into the next century in terms of security and prosperity. The value of the orders is in excess of £1,000 million. Continuity of employment is assured for approximately 15,000 people.

Those orders have been won not by special pleading, but by hard, commercial tendering in competition. I hope the new Secretary of State for Defence will follow his predecessor who, when appointed to the office, paid a visit to the shipyards in Barrow. We are grateful for the frequent visits made by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement to our part of the country; he has always been and always will be welcome.

The Government's commitment is in sharp contrast to the Official Opposition who make regular pilgrimages to Barrow. Tomorrow the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) will visit the area; a few months ago we had a visit from the hon. Member for Clackmannan. They come and they go, yet they still lack any firm commitment to what will take the place of Trident.

It is not yet official policy, but the Labour party has suggested that it intends to replace Trident by building more SSN hunter-killers. I hope that this is not what we shall hear from the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). Has the Labour party ever thought through what it is saying? Does the Royal Navy need or want that many more hunter-killers?

Mr. Duffy: Yes.

Mr. Franks: Does the Royal Navy have the personnel to man them? That is the weakness of the Labour party's thinking. It is no good fudging the issue, as it does over and again. Four years and more have passed since the Labour party made its commitment to scrap Trident. It has had long enough to come up with specific proposals as to what will take its place. The nation wants an answer, my constituents want that answer.

The Labour party is not just anti-Trident; it is emotionally anti-nuclear. I invite Labour Members to explain their inconsistency; they oppose nuclear energy but want to increase the number of nuclear-powered submarines. That inconsistency rings hollow.

On 31 March, Vickers, which incorporates Cammell Laird, will pass into private ownership. We do not know at this stage who the bidders will be and it would not be proper for me to express a firm commitment to any of

them, but I should like to express my firm commitment to the philosophy of a management-employee consortium buyout. The whole House should welcome wider share ownership. I trust that, when the decision is made, we shall have a strong and truly independent naval defence contractor.

I remind the House that the Royal Navy embraces far more than ships, submarines and the men who man them. Within its family are whole communities whose prosperity depends on it, just as it in turn depends on the skills and enthusiasm of the men who build the ships.

7.12 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I believe that I am the first Labour Member to congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. I endorse what the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said about his having a more pragmatic approach. He faces enormous problems and I hope that he can overcome them for the general good of the nation.

I should like to endorse what the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) said. I thought that he was reading excerpts from some of my speeches about the Royal Navy and the shipbuilding industry. He made some strong and pungent criticisms and it would be foolish of the Government to ignore what he said.

I speak on behalf of my consituents in Wallsend in the north-east and the Swan Hunter group, which is the biggest employer in the area and has been privatised. We are facing up to the reality of vigorous competition in defence and other activities. The public should rid themselves of the idea that the shipbuilding industry delivers late and has massive industrial relations problems.

I have looked at the record of delivery dates of some of the vessels built on the Tyne in the past two years. I found that, with the exception of the Atlantic Conveyor, all had been delivered on time. Indeed, much to the embarrassment of the Royal Navy, the Ark Royal was four months early. The Navy did not know what to do with it so it had a play about, after which it was delivered on time.

The original Atlantic Conveyor was sunk in the Falklands. The replacement could be a lesson to some of us. It is geared to perform a dual role. Part of the bridge is designed for Merchant Navy use and another is designed for action in the event of hostilities. It was late principally because it is owned by Cunard, which was trying to get a Rolls-Royce for a Morris Minor price. However, that saga has now ended.

The tragedy of shipbuilding is that when a ship is delivered, work ends. Men become unemployed. When the Ark Royal sailed down the River Tyne on completion, more than 50 per cent. of the personnel were put on the unemployment list when they were flown off the ship. That is a fact of life in shipbuilding and ship repair.

The work force is now down to 4,490—a reduction of 30 per cent. since 1984. There is a grim, but not completely pessimistic, outlook for the future in the area. The region has a long tradition of shipbuilding and ship repair. There is immense loyalty to the Royal Navy there —those who were on the ships and those who serve on them. That loyalty extends to the Merchant Navy. If hon. Members ever go to South Shields and see the war memorial for those who died in the 1914-18 and 1939-45 wars while serving in the Merchant Navy, they will get some idea of the scale of the sacrifice.

I am pleased that the Minister mentioned the size of the order book. We have three type 22 frigates under construction—HMS Sheffield, which is due for delivery in 1987, HMS Coventry, which is due for delivery in 1988, and HMS Chatham, which is due for delivery in 1989. All the pieces have been brought together with the help of new technology, and I am confident that they will all be delivered on time.

In addition, we have the replacement for the Sir Galahad, the original having been sunk in the Falklands. It is due for delivery in 1987. I am pleased that the Minister mentioned the Sir Tristram. I do not know whether he was on board when it was in the pool of London before being fully commissioned, but it is a tribute to the ingenuity of the designers and those who built it, as it is an exceedingly difficult ship to design and build. I hope that it will perform its role fully in the Royal Navy.

It is important to remember that work has to continue. It is important for the company to get off to a good start in the private sector. I beg the Minister urgently to consider the order for the auxiliary oil replenishment ship, for which I understand tenders have been placed. I do not want to appear to be too greedy, but I like to think that a second one might be ordered in the near future. On a more sour note, I know that Harland and Wolff has placed a tender for this ship.

The management of Swan Hunter are worried that the politics of Northern Ireland may come into the placing of the order. The Government are committed to free competition in defence contracts, so I hope that they will not be gulled into accepting a lower tender, which has probably been bolstered by the many forms of aid available to Northern Ireland. I should like a frank, open, fair and competitive tender. I hope that the influence of the Northern Ireland Ministers will not be brought to bear.

The Minister mentioned that he is honouring the commitment made last January to the ordering of a type 23. That was promised to Swan Hunter, but again, for political reasons, it has been given to Cammell Laird at a cost in excess of £7 million more than it would have cost if it had been built at the Swan Hunter yard.

The Swan Hunter management has built up an efficient team with technical expertise and qualifications. Massive amounts of money have been spent to bring new technology into the yard. It would be remiss of the Government not to consider giving the yard all the T23s that are supposed to be coming up for tender. I should like contracts for T23 Nos. 2, 3 and 4 to be placed at that establishment.

In the long run, the placing of that contract would be to the benefit of Swan Hunter and to the benefit of the Ministry of Defence, because the ships would be designed to the required qualifications much more cheaply than if they were spaced around the country in other shipyards.

In my judgment, the men who serve the ships are doing a good job. I am a little concerned about the wastage and the loss that was noted in a *Daily Telegraph* article recently. I understand why the Royal Navy's personnel lack the commitment to sail in peacetime for long periods. They probably do not feel the same urgency. They are sometimes bored with the routine, but they are still men and women of a high calibre.

I recommend increasing the personnel of the Royal Navy. Those who serve in the Royal Navy develop special characteristics. When they return to civvy life, they perform a useful role in society. They are committed,

[Mr. Ted Garrett]

dedicated and reliable and when they return, they are an asset to any prospective employer. The present need is to increase recruitment. At a time of 3·25 million unemployed, the calibre of the people that could be recruited would be of the highest.

7.24 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The House always listens with great interest to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) and I have listened to his remarks this evening with much interest. I shall not follow them except to say that I hope that Ministers will pay regard to the capacity of yards when placing shipbuilding orders and that they will not overlook Vosper Thornycroft on the south coast.

I wish to discuss the match between demands on royal naval and defence budgets and the cash available to meet those demands. First, I wish to raise a constituency matter of great importance that I shall seek also to raise in another debate. My remarks relate to the search-and-rescue helicopter based at HMS Daedalus at Lee-on-the-Solent. I understand that the Ministry of Defence is reviewing helicopter search and rescue availability on the south coast. The search and rescue helicopter based at HMS Daedalus comes within that review. The Spithead, Solent, Portsmouth harbour and Chichester harbour area is one of the busiest waterways in the world, with thousands of tankers, liners, yachts, ferries, surfboards, swimmers and fishermen. It is not surprising that the search and rescue helicopter at HMS Daedalus is the busiest of the search and rescue helicopter services operated by the Royal Navy.

If that helicopter should be withdrawn, the nearest helicopters would be at Portland and at Royal Air Force Manston in Kent, each of which would require about 20 minutes' extra flying time. When it is remembered that the Daedalus helicopter in the past 14 years has carried out 2,000 sorties and has rescued 850 people, the House will recognise that it would be unacceptable to the people of that area if that helicopter were withdrawn. It is a matter of great local concern.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be thrilled to discover that the local newspaper is proposing to run a campaign entitled "Save Our Helicopter". I am sure that he will hear much more about this matter and I hope that he will give an assurance soon that that helicopter will not be withdrawn.

My main point relates to defence commitments and matching them with resources. There is growing concern about their increasing imbalance. We have four main defence commitments. The first is the nuclear deterrent —Polaris, which is to be replaced by Trident. That is our most important defence commitment. The second is our commitment to the defence of the United Kingdom homeland. Our third commitment is to the European mainland, involving 55,000 troops in BAOR and a tactical air force in Germany. Our fourth commitment is in the eastern Atlantic and in the Channel.

To meet those commitments, we currently have resources at the level of £18,060 million in 1985. For the seventh year, the Government have honoured their commitment to NATO to increase defence spending by 3 per cent. a year. We spend about 20 per cent. more in real terms than when we inherited the Government in 1979, excluding Falklands expenditure.

I perceive symptoms of strain in the defence budget. There is a delay in procurement of ships. We are committed to about 50 frigates and destroyers, which relates to an ordering programme of three frigates or destroyers a year, but none has been ordered this financial year. There has been a delay in the replacement of the assault ships Fearless and Intrepid. There has been an increasing use of existing ships, and ships are now spending 50 per cent. of their time at sea, which is 10 per cent. more than they spent in wartime. A heavy burden is placed by the five-month rotation of ships that are serving in the Falklands.

It is clear that the Royal Navy needs more men. The 1981 Defence Review proposed that the Navy's strength should be reduced to 62,800 in 1985 and would be 60,400 in 1986. According to a press report dated 1 February 1986, Captain Michael Gretton, director of naval officer recruiting, said that instead of running down the naval strength to 56,000 by the early 1990s, the Government now propose that the number of men in the Royal Navy in 1993 will be about 63,000. I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm the truth of those figures.

There is an urgent need for the replacement of the Shackleton aircraft and for an adequate early warning system. This point is outside the immediate area of the Royal Navy, but it is relevant. We shall soon be faced with the massive cost of the fly-by-wire, inherently unstable, air superiority European fighter aircraft. We must also take into account the fact that our commitment to increase defence expenditure by 3 per cent. a year has ended. Therefore, it is increasingly urgent that we should match our commitments with our resources. I fear that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who I welcome to his present post, may be unwittingly cast as John Nott mark 2.

How do we resolve this conundrum? Dedicated though I am to defence and to the armed forces, I do not believe that a further increase in the defence budget is realistic. We have increased our budget by 3 per cent. for seven years, and we are now spending 20 per cent. more than we did in 1979. We spend more per head on defence than any of our NATO allies except the United States.

The Government sought to reassure us in the defence White Paper by showing how we shall meet our commitments and match them with our resources. Paragraph 503 of volume 1 of the 1985 White Paper states:

"The forward programme should not be seen as a rigid plan stretching ten years ahead, establishing commitments in detail to exact equipment numbers with specified in-service dates. It is in practice continually being adjusted for a range of reasons, including technological and industrial constraints and opportunities, as well as budgetary limitations."

It goes on to describe this policy as "programme adjustment".

Apart from programme adjustment—whether it be a change of mind, delay or uncertainty—becoming almost an art form, I must tell my hon. Friends that programme adjustment has built into it two inexorable rules. The first is that costs increase and do not decrease; the second is that programmes move to the right, not to the left. In other words, programmes are delayed, not brought forward.

We could do two things to contain the growing demand within a static budget, and the first relates to procurement. We pay little more than lip service to co-operation. Only 15 per cent. of our defence ventures are collaborative. It is extremely important that we have more collaborative projects so that we can pool our productive skills with

those of other nations, but, perhaps more importantly, so that we can pool our market demands. In civil aircraft manufacturing, a run of 500 of one model is regarded as the break-even point, yet that rule is consistently broken in defence procurement.

Our national pride and the need to create jobs make us insist on our own ships, early warning radar, tanks and submarines, but the additional cost is enormous. For example, the British Army has the Ptarmigan battlefield communications system, which Plessey failed to sell to the United States. It became apparent then that Ptarmigan cost 60 per cent. more than the French alternative, yet the British Army bought it. We need much more co-operation and interoperability. Our pride and our nationalism often stop us operating with common sense in this area.

There is a common torpedo size among NATO allies, but there is no common fire control system. Therefore, if British submarines have no more torpedos, they cannot use torpedos produced by our NATO allies because the fire control system is different. We are incurring great costs in all those areas. NATO spends more on defence than the Warsaw pact countries, yet we are outnumbered by two or three to one in some aircraft, guns and tanks in Europe. But that is a result of the ruthless specialisation and mass production of the Warsaw pact countries and NATO's failure to do the same.

The United Kingdom spends half of its Government-funded research and development resources on defence, but it is still not nearly enough for us to keep up in the major league. Therefore, we need much more co-operation in ventures and the pooling of production runs is essential.

My second proposal is that we should also save money on the British Army of the Rhine. Although this debate is about the Royal Navy, I should point out that Britain spends 60 per cent. more on defence than Germany, yet we maintain in Germany an Army of 55,000 people and a tactical Air Force at a cost in 1985 of £1,899 million. Of that, local defence expenditure, representing drawings of foreign exchange necessary to support our forces overseas, amounted to £920 million. How can we justify that expenditure when we already spend so much more than the Germans? I recognise the crucial role of the United Kingdom as the linchpin of NATO, but we must try to make economies in that area.

Many defence Ministers stand at the Dispatch Box and promise us cuts in the tail, not in the teeth, of expenditure. My constituents hear those claims with scepticism because they know that the rhetoric is better than the reality. I know from my visits and other contacts over many years that the naval yards and depots play a vital role in the maintenance of the fleet, and it is time that their dedicated service was recognised. Recently, many of the local civilian functions have been under review, which causes great uncertainty and worry. If the workers were not so dedicated and loyal, I am sure that there would have been industrial action before now. But they are loyal and dedicated, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to join in paying tribute to the workers at royal naval aircraft yard Fleetlands and other establishments.

For those hon. Members who may not realise the extent to which my constituency is bound up with the Royal Navy, may I mention the names of other establishments in my constituency, every one of which employs more than 1,000 people and some of which employ several thousand people. They include the royal naval armaments depot at Gosport, the Royal Clarence victualling yard, HMS Centurion, HMS Sultan, HMS Dolphin, HMS Daedalus, HMS Collingwood and the royal naval hospital Haslar. It is time that the back-up boys and girls had a word of recognition and I ask the Minister to accept that any savings in that area are likely to be modest and could even be counter-productive.

7.36 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I was pleased to hear the Minister pay tribute to the present-day personnel of the Royal Navy. As someone who, like the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann), spent his wartime service in the Navy, I am glad to hear that the high standards of the service with which we were connected have not slipped in any way. The Minister mentioned the Navy in the Falklands when he listed our present commitments. It occurred to me that if the Government had not stupidly withdrawn HMS Endurance from the south Atlantic, there might have been no need for the Navy to be in the Falklands now.

I welcome the Minister's assurance of the continuation of the Navy's role in fishery protection. That is more essential than ever with the accession of Spain and Portugal to the Common Market. Those of my age group will recall the vital service performed by the Navy in the early part of the second world war before the other services made their contributions. The patrol service was manned by fishermen and merchant seamen. Of course, others served, but initially the trained seamen came from the fishing and merchant fleets. Now the deep sea trawling fleets have gone altogether. Liners from the merchant service were requisitioned as armed merchant cruisers for the protection of convoys.

I refer briefly to the need for a helicopter on the west coast of Scotland. Recently, there was a tragic accident when the crew of a fishing boat was lost because of the delay in getting a helicopter to the scene. I do not criticise the helicopter crew or the service, but it had to come from the other side of Scotland and valuable time was lost. I hope that the Secretary of State will listen sympathetically to the recent campaign for a helicopter base on the west coast.

I confess that I know little of today's Royal Navy, other than the information available in the press. Therefore, I shall not waste time commenting on the current naval establishment or its building programme. However—the Falklands conflict confirmed this, and it underlines the point made so cogently by the right hon. Member for Taunton—the Navy cannot function without auxiliaries from the Merchant Navy. Without the pool of trained seamen from the merchant and fishing fleets during wartime, the Navy would be in dire trouble.

The Minister referred to the number of ships—but the issue is manning those ships with trained people when the time comes. The protection of our maritime nation cannot be guaranteed by vessels flying the white ensign. The Government have allowed the Merchant Navy to disappear to an extent that is dangerous to defence. In past speeches I have referred to the effect of that shrinkage on trade and employment. This Government, so dedicated to defence and apparently putting no limit on the money that they are prepared to spend on it, show an indifference to the disappearance of the merchant fleet that is hardly credible.

[Mr. Donald Stewart]

The proposed Channel tunnel will add to the loss of jobs for seamen. There is also the decision of BP Shipping to sack 1,700 United Kingdom seafarers and to transfer 30 of its ships. Two BP-owned tankers, flagged out of the Bahamas in 1985, are manned with an all-Filipino crew, with the exception of a British master and engineer. No doubt, in time, those two posts will also go. The Government must intervene to safeguard the loss of those 1,700 jobs.

If the Soviet fleet is of the scale suggested by the Minister—and I have no reason to doubt his figures—and if the Soviet Union is the potential enemy, we shall start with grave disadvantages should there be an outbreak of war. It is vital to reverse the trend of allowing the Merchant Navy to bleed to death. The operational requirements of the Royal Navy and its strategic role are impossible without its link with the Merchant Navy.

I hope that that message, at least, will be taken on board by the Minister.

7.42 pm

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): The House listened to the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) with great care. I share much of his sentiment about the Merchant Navy. I listened with interest to what he said about Scotland because, as a naval gunfire officer, I frequently fire NATO ships' guns on to Cape Wrath—not in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, as he will be relieved to hear.

If anyone thought that there was a vestige of credibility remaining in the Labour party, that myth was dispelled tonight by the extraordinary statement of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), who tried to persuade my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) — who made an effective speech — that the shipyard workers at Barrow were content with the prospect of the cancellation of the Trident programme. That was an extraordinary statement, and I do not think that anyone in the House believed it. The shipyard workers in Barrow will take careful note of what the hon. Gentleman said, especially as he provided no specific alternative for work for those who so desperately need it.

The Labour party is clearly intent not only on not spending more on defence, but on cutting defence expenditure dramatically.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): We shall spend more.

Mr. Best: I shall listen with interest to what the right hon. Gentleman says when he replies to the debate. I shall put my specific allegation to him, and he can deal with it later.

The Labour party will cancel Trident, but it will not spend the money that is saved on defence. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to gainsay that, I shall certainly give him the opportunity.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I have merely said that, without Trident, we can meet all the present conventional commitments. With Trident, this Government cannot meet all their conventional commitments — such as a 50-warship Navy, Nimrod, amphibious vessels, the European fighter aircraft and the maintainance of the British Army of the Rhine. With Trident that cannot be done. Without it those commitments can and will be met.

Mr. Best: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has now clarified the matter. The Labour party is saying that it would spend the money that it saved on Trident on conventional forces. That is a welcome admission, if that is what the right hon. Gentleman really means. He will have another opportunity to clarify that later.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) said in a most effective speech, ships currently spend 50 per cent. of their time at sea—10 per cent. more than during the war years and three times more than the level of the 1930s. That is a tremendous strain on those serving in the Royal Navy—as I realised when I have had the privilege of serving with them. That leads me to the conclusion that we are in grave danger of having far too few ships.

When my right hon. Friend the Minister said that Hermes is now on the disposal list, I wondered whether he had thought seriously about the American way of dealing with these matters. That is to update the technology, but keep the hulls. Carriers such as the Coral Sea and the Midway had their hulls laid down more than 40 years ago, but are destined to serve well into the next century. Modern technology has uprated those ships. The Americans do not have our attitude, which is to scrap our so-called redundant ships. Will my right hon. Friend seriously consider the American option, especially for Hermes, which is a very fine ship?

Self-corroboration is the lowest form of parliamentary debate. However, I hope that the House will forgive me if I refer to the fact that on 28 November 1983, in a debate on the Royal Navy, I drew the Government's attention to the great benefits of the S90 over the type 23. I mentioned that tests on models doing a comparison between the type 23 and the S90 showed that in calm waters the S90 was one knot slower than the type 23, that it matched it in rough weather, but in high seas, with waves of up to 50 ft in height, maintained a steady 25 knots, whereas the type 23 pitched and rolled so violently that it had to be restricted to 15 knots for its own safety.

The question of cost is especially relevant. In figures of that time, the type 23 was likely to cost £100 million or more, and perhaps £200 million by the completion of the final ship at the end of the rolling programme. The costs appeared to be increasing by about 10 per cent. in real terms over the rate of inflation. Therefore, by the end of the century the Royal Navy could afford to buy only one ship a year, leaving only 30 frigates by the year 2000. I believe that it is generally accepted that there should be a minimum of 50

The S90 can be produced for £60 million to £70 million. To take the hull away from the combat suite—the hull itself is £33 million — is far cheaper than the Government's decision to buy the replacement frigates.

I shall not fight old battles. However, only recently the press reported that a secret report, which will be presented to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, demands a judicial inquiry into the choice of recent warship designs, claiming that the Royal Navy has been buying expensive frigates when a cheaper and more powerful alternative has been available. That report follows an investigation by Lord Hill-Norton and an official committee of experts, set up with the knowledge of Downing street. It suggests that the Royal Navy and the Government were misled by their

advisers and may have been buying expensive frigates and destroyers when a cheaper and more powerful alternative was available.

The investigating team was unable to discover how that advice came to be given, and was so concerned by its findings that it recommended that a judge should head a further inquiry by experts outside the Government. It wants the merits of long, thin traditional design and the radical short fat alternative re-examined.

We know that that report exists, because I put down a question to my hon. Friend the Minister and he replied most helpfully:

"I cannot comment on Lord Hill-Norton's report until it is received and I have had the opportunity to study it. Publication will, of course, be a matter for the author."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1986; Vol 90, c. 640.]

That question was answered to my satisfaction because my hon. Friend acknowledged the existence of the report. I hope that the House will be informed as to what the report says, and whether there is to be a judicial inquiry into whether we are buying one warship when we could be affording three for the same cost and overcoming the problem to which I have referred.

I move on now to our amphibious forces. Lieutenant General Steuart Pringle, the Commandant General of the Royal Marines, in a lecture to the Royal United Services Institute on 5 June 1984, said:

"A nation which lives on an island cannot turn its back on the sea . . . It follows that if that nation sees the possibility of a need to influence events by use of military power, it needs either an amphibious force or an airborne force, or, preferably, both."

I think that none would dissent from that view. It is obvious in this debate that we should concentrate on the amphibious forces and that they should be credible.

Mr. Garrett: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I feel that he should go a little further and attack the present level of amphibious forces. If we are to mount campaigns and exercises in Norway, we must again draw upon the Merchant Navy for our vehicles.

Mr. Best: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I listened to him with care. He always speaks with great authority, as the House has come to expect. I agree with much of what he had to say about the Merchant Navy. I shall develop the theme of our amphibious forces.

I had the privilege to serve on HMS Intrepid in September last year on exercise Rolling Deep in my military capacity. That was a well planned and successfully executed exercise. However, I was able to see the strains placed on our amphibious forces by the nature of the shipping. Fearless and Intrepid are in need of replacement. When I served on Intrepid we had a brigade staff, and the ship was full to bursting, with no extra space. Without going into further details, which might be of an tendentious nature and which I might not be allowed to mention in any event, that demonstrates the fact that we need to concentrate far more on the replacement and renovation of our existing amphibious capability.

We are no longer a great military power, and we cannot pretend otherwise. That point was made by the hon. Member for Clackmannan. We are no longer a prime military power in the world, but recent history has demonstrated fully that we must be prepared to undertake operations outside the NATO area. Indeed, all active operations in recent memory have been conducted outside that area. Our amphibious forces are the one aspect of our defence that gives us full flexibility in time of national and NATO need.

Within the NATO context, amphibious warfare is the only scope that we have for offensive diversion. That was recognised in an essay on amphibious warfare written by Sir Basil Liddell Hart in 1960, in which he examined the way in which large German forces during the last war had been diverted disproportionately to the threat of amphibious operations posed by the allies.

One of the most important aspects of deterrence is the uncertainty of intention, and that can be achieved more effectively by amphibious operations than in any other way. He wrote:

"the basic lesson is that offensive distraction is most effective when it carries a wide strategic threat, and where there is ample room for its development by attack to be expanded easily and quickly into a widening practical threat."

That is a sentence with which I wholeheartedly concur, as I do with his opinion that amphibious forces have become more necessary as a deterrent and as a counter to local limited aggression—a counter that can be used without being suicidal and a deterrent that is therefore credible. Had the capability of our amphibious forces been appreciated, I very much doubt that Argentina would have invaded the Falkland Islands.

This theme is developed in an article in the August 1985 edition of the RUSI journal by Captain H. A. Corbett. He used an example from a planning process in the 1950s that could be used to set the scene. To obtain planning agreement for eventual construction of the Fearless class of assault ship, provision was required for an armoured squadron with its specific establishment of tanks and vehicles to be embarked. The outcome was that initially the size of the flat upper deck space required was elevated to the number of three-ton lorry equivalents that could be stowed between decks with tanks embarked.

By the time that HMS Fearless, the first of class, came to be built, arrangements were already being improvised to make alternative use of this deck to operate helicopters and, happily, it was both large and strong enough. In reality we now have triphibious operations rather than just amphibious operations.

It is imperative that we leave the rest of the world, particularly Argentina, in no doubt that our amphibious capability will not only continue but will be enhanced in the future, so that there can be no speculation as to whether the Falklands conflict would have ended differently if the Argentine fleet had come out of port. The idea of amphibious operations being used as an offensive diversion—in effect, the only one that we have—falls into line with the United States concept of operations.

There are two reasons for the relevance of this to Britain. The first is the significance of the northern flank, especially Norway, which was understood by Hitler only too well, and has not been lost on the Soviets with their large marine infantry group based in Murmansk and the Kola inlet which is home for their northern fleet and its 190 submarines. If an advance were made to Tromso, that would bring Soviet aircraft 500 miles closer to the United Kingdom, and if their advance were to move further to Bergen, the result is obviously a great threat to our nation.

In the event of aggression, it is essential that we protect the northern flank, and with the coastline and limited communications possible in Norway this can be done only by amphibious forces. In the event of aggression, to lose

[Mr. Best]

Norway would seriously imperil the United Kingdom by bringing Soviet forces within closer range of our home base.

Secondly, denying the northern flank to any Soviet aggression reduces the capacity of Soviet forces to endanger the vital supply line across the Atlantic. In addition, offensive operations on the northern flank could strike close to the heartland of the Soviet Union—the only point at which this can be done with any feasibility —and thus check any aggression within central Europe, where NATO would be forced to fight a defensive battle in any event. It would also have the effect of bottling up the powerful northern Soviet fleet.

Therefore, it was with great concern that I read in the newspaper that consideration is being given not to the replacement of Fearless and Intrepid or their upgrading, with a great deal of new technology, but to extending their life into the next century, and using merchant ships to give us some sort of second-class amphibious role. That would be unacceptable to the House. Our amphibious forces are the finest in the world, and we owe a duty to them. More importantly, we owe a duty to our nation to preserve and enhance the credibility of the only offensive forces that we still have — forces that have served the nation well throughout their history and will, I believe, do so in the future.

8 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make a brief contribution to this debate. I shall confine my remarks to three broad headings: the strategic implications of the subject of this debate, the merchant marine and the important constituency interests which, representing a shipbuilding community, it is my duty to place on record.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred, rightly, to the growth in the Soviet Union's conventional naval capacity. He was also right to refer to the fact that it poses a challenge not just to the United Kingdom but to NATO. I see no immediate prospect of the United Kingdom having a defensive strategy outside NATO. The logical consequence is that there are two key strategic issues for this country: first, the cost of Trident and the effect of that cost on the defence budget, and, secondly, the rationale for an independent United Kingdom nuclear deterrent.

Important decisions have to be taken. The decisions that are taken in the next two years will set the course of British defence policy until the turn of the century. My view is that this country's defence interests will be better served by supplementing NATO's conventional forces with our 50 fleet Navy rather than by duplicating the massive nuclear arsenal of the United States with a smaller nuclear arsenal of our own. I cannot conceive of circumstances in which this country would independently use its nuclear deterrent against the Soviet Union without the involvement of the United States and, having done so, survive. Other nation states with economies the size of our own, or indeed larger, do not think that it is necessary for their defence to have an enhanced nuclear capacity. That is a strategic argument. The logical consequence is that our contribution to NATO should be expressed in conventional terms. Part of that conventional contribution should be made through the Royal Navy.

The right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) made some important points about the merchant fleet. He said that it was an integral part of our ability to defend ourselves at sea, and he set out effectively the frightening situation that faces the British merchant fleet. By endorsing his remarks, I hope that I do not do him too much harm among his hon. Friends.

A report of the Select Committee on Defence, headed "The Use of Merchant Shipping for Defence Purposes", summed up the position in 1984-85. That was a year ago. It said:

> "Although the consequences of the present decline in British maritime resources may appear to be largely economic, we believe the Government should show greater awareness of the risk to national security inherent in loss of independence in the carriage of seaborne commerce. Effective deterrence requires that no would-be aggressor is tempted by vulnerability. Present trends seem to be setting in this dangerous direction. The striking contrast between British, and indeed Allied, maritime resources and those of the Warsaw Pact countries, in inverse proportion to the relative dependence of each alliance on sea communication, is extremely disturbing."

We have received a reassurance from the Minister, but for how much longer will Ministers be able to come to the Dispatch Box and give such reassurances? The right hon. Member for Taunton pointed out that the trend of events is going in one direction, that it will not plateau out and that it will not turn around unless the state intervenes. It is not just a question of ships; it is also a question of people.

I, like many other right hon. and hon. Members, have received a letter from John Newman, the deputy general secretary of NUMAST. This is a consortium of groups that incorporates the Merchant Navy and Airline Officers Association, the Mercantile Marine Service Association and the Radio and Electronic Officers Union. In his letter Mr. Newman refers, as did the right hon. Member for Taunton, to British Petroleum. He says:

> "We do not believe that BP has any intention of ensuring continued British manning on its ships. If its flag-out moves are allowed to follow the pattern of others in recent years we can confidently predict that within the very near future, firstly, the UK ratings will be replaced; then the junior officers' jobs will be handed to Filipinos or others; very shortly thereafter most of the UK senior officers will go; after a further period the UK Master and Chief Engineer will be replaced, and the ships will then be totally manned with foreign crews and 1,700 jobs for British seafarers will be lost for ever together with the professional maritime expertise we need in both peace and war. That is our hard experience of other flagged-out tonnage in recent years, and our predictions for the future in BP are further reinforced by the fact that two BP owned tankers flagged out to the Bahamas during 1985 are currently manned throughout with an all Filipino crew plus a British Master and Chief Engineer."

The Government have a duty to do something about that now. It cannot be allowed to continue; otherwise there will be nothing left about which to intervene. We cannot afford to lose either the ships or the ownership and, most crucial of all, we cannot afford to lose skilled people.

A few of my hon. Friends and I had the privilege recently to meet representatives of the General Council of British Shipping to discuss these problems. We were told that the corporate future for a substantial part of its operations lies outside shipping and that it certainly lies outside shipowning. It was pointed out that it is still possible to make a profit from managing ships, if there is corporate expertise, but that it is not possible to make a profit from owning ships. The significance of that for our defence interests should be obvious to every hon. Member.

The right hon. Member for Taunton rightly said that we are not discussing just the trends in the industry. We are discussing economic warfare. The possession of a merchant fleet and of heavy industry is evidence of economic strength. They make a nation powerful. We are under attack from two sources: first from the Eastern bloc, not just for economic reasons but for strategic and military reasons, and, secondly, from the trading communities in the far east. If we allow our merchant marine to decline and disappear, the trading organisations of the far east will then show us the true price of shipping and shipbuilding and of possessing a merchant fleet. Our nation will be unable to do anything about it. The right hon. Member for Taunton also called for the creation of a Minister for the marine fleet. A Minister of Cabinet status is needed to take an overall view of this deplorable situation.

I come now to the points that I wish to make on behalf of my constituents. I welcome the new Secretary of State for Defence to his appointment. For the people of Tyneside anybody is better than the last Secretary of State for Defence. We feel that he had an affection for other parts of the country—not an affection for the north-east of England. I do not intend to repeat the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett). We share a shipyard. The Neptune yard and the old Walker naval yard are in my constituency and the Wallsend yard is in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Until recently Swan Hunter was not solely a warship yard. It has been forced by the Government to become a warship yard. Until recently it had a proud tradition of building fine merchant and specialist vessels as well as general vessels. It is not by choice that it is now confined solely to building warships. It is not by choice, either, that well over half the work force have lost their jobs during the last 10 years. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) rightly stood up for the 12,000 jobs at the shipyard in Barrow-in-Furness. Union leaders tell me that they can remember the time when thousands of men employed by Swan Hunter could march up the bank and when there would be mass meetings of 20,000 men. Swan Hunter now employs 3,100 manual workers. The effect upon the riverside community that is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend and me has been traumatic.

We realise that, since Swan Hunter has been forced to become a warship yard, it has but one customer, the Ministry of Defence. All that our community asks of the Ministry of Defence is that it should be treated fairly. That has not happened in the past. The Secretary of State and other Ministers have always hesitated to state clearly whether orders were to be placed solely on the basis of competitive tendering or whether the Secretary of State was running some social policy of his own, independent of the rest of the Government and certainly independent of the structural needs of the shipbuilding industry.

We feel that we were badly treated when the type 22 order, which could have come to Swan Hunter, was placed with Cammell Laird instead. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend quoted the on-cost of splitting that order as being about £7 million. An article in today's *Daily Telegraph* suggests that the on-cost to the Ministry of Defence under the social policy of the previous Secretary of State for Defence was £9 million. Although I am happy to see employment continue at Cammell Laird, I have to say that, in compensation for that, it was made clear that Swan Hunter would receive the No. 2 type 23 warship in good time subject to price. That promise has not been kept. We are still waiting for the type 23 to be committed. We have had an assurance tonight that it will be committed and I am grateful for that. I do not want to be churlish but we have not had an assurance as to whether the type 23 will be committed on its own or alongside the No. 3 and No. 4 type 23.

These vessels are equally crucial to the short-to-medium-term existence of Swan Hunter. Through no choice of the Tyneside community, Swan Hunter has now been forced into a restrictive order programme. We either get the type 23 and two auxiliary vessels or there will be major redundancies in a community which cannot tolerate any more major redundancy rounds. The last redundancy round at Swan Hunter saw 2,200 jobs disappear in one swoop. That is a hell of a job loss for a community like ours to sustain.

The other aspect which affects my constituents is the matter of the two auxiliary vessels for which Swan Hunter is in competition with Harland and Wolff. I understand the difficulties in Northern Ireland and I make no criticism of the Government for trying to preserve employment there. I have to say that the unemployment levels in the communities around Harland and Wolff are lower than those around Swan Hunter. That is a horrific fact and one that is overlooked by Parliament and the Government.

The careers centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, to which all school leavers are encouraged to go to seek what employment is available in the city, has a whole range of leaflets. The leaflets offer information about careers for plumbers, electricians and all the things that young people would like to do if the jobs were available. On the desk at the front of the centre where the senior careers officer sits is a tiny card index. That index contains the jobs available. Last week there were only 40 jobs available for school leavers and they consisted mainly of filling up shelves in supermarkets and working in the retail industry. That is a horrendous prospect for the young people of our community. If the Government stretch defence orders because of the difficulties they face in financing the defence programme—involving either the type 23 or the two auxiliary vessels — they will cause substantial damage to the communities which I and my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend represent.

There would be no need to stretch that programme if the Government had not invested and committed an enormous sum of money to the Trident programme. We are asking for a fair hearing for our communities, for both the type 23 and the fleet auxiliaries which go alongside the type 23s and without which the type 23 programme does not make much sense.

All that I have said is a call for help from a community that used to be legendary in its association with the shipbuilding industry. We realise that the industry has been substantially run down not least by the policy that the Government are taking towards the Royal Navy. My fear is that when these difficult decisions are approved by the Secretary of State, he will find it easier to elongate the Government's commitments to a 50 fleet Navy than to make any of the other difficult decisions that face him. I would urge him very strongly not to do that. The Royal Navy has been treated for far too long as the easiest cut for the Secretary of State to make. That must stop—not just for the sake of the community that I represent but for the sake of the defence interests of the country.

8.16 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I listened to what my right hon. Friend the Minister said earlier this afternoon about the programme for ordering new frigates. I find it difficult to reconcile the firm commitment that he appeared to be giving with the assurance, which we have accepted to be absolute, that we will maintain a surface fleet of 50 major vessels.

The number of vessels which were firmly promised today would not guarantee that position. My arithmetic may be wrong, but I would ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to give a resounding and clear commitment to a 50 ship Navy for the foreseeable future. That would have a great influence on improving morale not only in the Navy but in all the cities and towns which support the Navy and which are so closely associated with it.

The Minister also referred to the torpedo programme. In considering the ordering of frigates and the consideration given to the torpedo programme, one of the ways in which the rapidly escalating costs of naval defence can be positively influenced is by ensuring that the maximum possible overseas sales are obtained for the type of equipment which is selected for use by the Royal Navy. It is many years since this country sold a new frigate overseas. We have not been successful in doing that, and I wonder whether the suggestion which was floated earlier this afternoon—that we look for closer links with our NATO allies—might not perhaps be a misleading way of approaching this task.

The specific duties of our European NATO allies are not the same as the duties we place on the Royal Navy both through our membership of NATO and through other roles. While we have heard from hon. Members from the north-east, the north-west and from Scotland about the need for placing orders for new vessels with yards in those areas which have unemployment problems, I suggest that there is also a need to ensure that we reinforce success where that is possible.

Vosper Thornycroft, in Southampton, both in its earlier private form and in it nationalised form, has consistently been able to maintain an export market. That company needs to have the opportunity of a major warship order to ensure that it keeps its workforce together. That workforce has proved itself in the past to be capable of building warships for export. At present that yard is exporting warships to the Middle East.

I realise that there is a limit to the number of type 23 frigates which can be allocated. No one will receive all that they would like, but I would suggest that the Minister ought to be discussing with the successful exporting ship building yards such as Vospers the prospects of building ships for the Royal Navy which could also be sold overseas.

I am not thinking necessarily of vessels such as the type 23, which began as relatively simple platforms and gradually developed to become ships as complex as any that the Royal Navy has ever had. I have in mind the type of rugged vessel that might be needed in a situation that precedes war, or which might prevent the outbreak of hostilities. I can well remember the disproportionate damage which was inflicted on some of our sophisticated vessels by the relatively simple Icelandic gunboats during the cod wars not so many years ago. There is a need for the Royal Navy to have rugged vessels that are capable of operating within a limited distance of our shores. Such vessels would have a prospect of sales overseas, which is something that the Ministry of Defence and the successful exporters should be exploring at all times.

When we have a winner that can be a world beater, the message should go out loud and clear from Her Majesty's Government. They should make it known that we are proud of what we have and that we have absolute faith in it. Our torpedo programme had a chequered history before it was placed in the hands of the Marconi company. The lightweight Sting Ray programme is well within cost and time in production terms. In Sting Ray we have a weapon which is proven to be capable of meeting the Navy's requirements. Such a weapon is a prime instrument for exporting. Exports will reduce unit costs and the result will be a saving for the Navy in future.

The Public Accounts Committee reviewed the history of the torpedo programme, and it was unfortunate that it failed to recognise the remarkable changes that have taken place over the past few years. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement will forgive me if I appear to be preparing his reply for him, but I ask him to sound a clarion call that we in Britain have a world beater in the Sting Ray. The Navy is satisfied with it; it believes that it is the sort of weapon that is necessary for anti-submarine work in future. All the signs are that the heavyweight torpedo, which is known as Spearfish, will in its turn be as successful as Sting Ray. If we are to sell overseas, it is important that the MOD bangs the drum for products that come within sectors in which we are already successful.

We have fewer ships and fewer men in the Royal Navy than in the past and there has been a disproportionate running down of the naval presence in the great and premier naval port of Portsmouth. Against that background, it is vital that the Navy should be seen, and one way in which that is possible is through its military bands. I shall not attempt to raise the issue of whether we should have separate bands for individual services or a defence school of music. However, having had the chance to read the PAC's report on the proposed defence school of music, which was published today, there is no doubt in my mind that the arguments which were advanced by my late colleague, Mr. Ralph Bonner Pink, and which I have continued to advance since 1979 on behalf of the Eastney option for the Royal Marines school of music, have been proved to be correct.

Whether we should have a defence school of music at Eastney is another matter, but there is a clear need for us to retain the Royal Marines school of music at the Eastney barracks. The school is combined with and is supplementary to the magnificent Royal Marines museum. It would be unthinkable for that building to be left like a sore thumb, as it were, among a housing estate, for example. The museum and the school are complementary.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know that I wrote to him only a short while ago about the need to maintain the Royal Marines voluntary cadet corps, which is an extremely important recruiting service for the Royal Navy. It has a membership of 200 boys, who meet regularly in the Eastney barracks. Portsmouth believes in the cadet corps fundamentally and it believes also that the museum-school-barracks complex should be maintained.

Mr. Garrett: I am 100 per cent. on the side of the hon. Gentleman. Those who have not read the PAC report will

realise when they do so that meagre savings are involved when they are set against the pleasure that the 80 bands of Her Majesty's forces give to the public. They provide training in musicianship and the necessary complementary disciplines for the spending of a comparatively meagre sum. In an Adjournment debate, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) made an impassioned plea for Kneller hall. I recognise all the economies that are needed, but it would be an act of vandalism to abolish Kneller hall.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that intervention. I criticised the PAC a few minutes ago, but it must be recognised that we are all selective in our praise and criticism. In this instance, the PAC has done an invaluable job in setting out objectively cases which were difficult to judge for the Ministry of Defence when they were made by individual Members. I accept that that has been a difficult task, but it is clear now that the place for the Royal Marines school of music is at Eastney, and it is for that that we should be pressing.

I have asked my hon. Friend the Minister to sound two clarion calls and a roll on the drums. If he can give me the three assurances that I seek, I can assure him that he will receive a generous and warm welcome when he next visits Portsmouth.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. I should like every hon. Member who has been present throughout the afternoon and evening and who wishes to participate in the debate to have the opportunity of doing so. If hon. Members who catch my eye confine themselves to 10 minutes, all those who wish to contribute to the debate will be able to do so.

8.28 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I shall use my time to focus on one illuminating episode involving discredit on politicians and not on the Royal Navy. I shall focus on the loss, or alleged loss, of the control room logbook from HMS Conqueror.

Before I start to set out the story in narrative form, I wish to make it clear that I have no criticism whatever to make or imply about two police officers, Detective Chief Superintendent Ron Hardy and Detective Sergeant Mike Ashdown, to whom I must necessarily refer. To the best of my belief, they are competent and sensible police officers and a credit to the Scotland Yard serious crimes squad. I should say this as I am sending a copy of my speech to the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Thomas Hetherington.

Out of the blue, the BBC and Independent Radio morning news on 7 November 1984 told their listeners that it had been discovered that a logbook from the Conqueror, the submarine that sank the Belgrano, had gone missing. I was surprised for two separate reasons. First, how could the Navy, with its reputation for efficiency, have allowed apparently crucial documents and data simply to disappear, even in ordinary circumstances? To allow documents pertaining to the sinking of the Belgrano to disappear — the only time that a nuclear-powered submarine has ever been involved in actual military action —was doubly incredible.

My second cause for surprise was that the announcement was made on the very morning on which the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the then Secretary of State for Defence, was to appear before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, at a hearing which had aroused so much interest that it was to be broadcast live on Radio 4.

Was the loss of a logbook a political smokescreen to divert attention from other matters? The private notice question that was heard on 7 November 1985 on the missing logbook and the setting up of a board of inquiry did not answer that question.

For the sake of coherence, I had better say that I subsequently made discreet inquiries of the members of the crew of HMS Conqueror. They told me that there was no way in which, given their debriefing, any of them could have taken vital documents before the submarine went for her refit. To the idea espoused by some hon. Members that a member of the crew had suddenly taken the notion that the logbook would be a nice memento to have on a sideboard of his dining room in years to come, I was given the caustic answer, "Do you think that any of us would have risked a court martial for stealing such a document simply for a memento? Don't be daft?" Submariners tell me that it simply beggars belief that any crew member would have taken a logbook and rendered himself subject to a court martial offence.

I ask the new Secretary of State, first, if he will find out from his Department and from the Navy whether any logbook ever did go missing. Secondly, if a logbook did go missing, is anyone in the Navy under suspicion for having taken it for his own reasons? Thirdly, I must ask the right hon. Gentleman, in the aftermath of Westland, if anyone in the Navy removed a logbook, did he do it under "ministerial instructions"? Could he put the answers to those questions in the "public domain"? If there were any "differences of understanding" about the logbook, can the House of Commons be told? If a logbook was lost, who took it away, why and for what motive? Who would have the opportunity of taking it away? Who, apart from Ministers, in October and November 1982 had any interest in taking it away?

I should like to put on record two questions which I asked the Attorney-General. I asked him:

"if the conclusion of the Director of Public Prosecutions that further police investigations were unlikely to produce any evidence of a criminal offence, regarding the disappearance of the control room log book of HMS Conqueror based on information about the whereabouts at the time, or the current whereabouts, of the relevant portions of the log; and if he will make a statement."

The Solicitor-General replied:

"The police investigations were unable to identify at what point of time or in what circumstances the control room logs in question were improperly handled with the result that they are now missing. Their present whereabouts are not known. The conclusion that further investigations are unlikely to provide evidence of the commission of a criminal offence is based on the inconclusiveness of the information so far obtained about the circumstances in which the logs disappeared and the absence of any leads to further avenues of inquiry which might throw light on those circumstances."

Sir Humphrey Appleby could not have put it more clearly. I asked the Attorney-General—

"pursuant to the answer of 21 October, *Official Report*, column 12, regarding the disappearance of the control room log of HMS Conqueror, whether the police inquiry revealed that a criminal offence had been committed; and if he will make a statement."

The Solicitor-General replied:

"I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 21 October. The conclusion of the Director of Public Prosecutions, in the light of the report of the police investigations, was that the evidence available did not establish that a criminal offence had been

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committed in connection with the disappearance of the logs. I concurred in that conclusion."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1985; Vol. 84, c. *194*.]

Sir Robert Armstrong, in his great form yesterday, could not have put that more eloquently.

I fear that the comparisons with Westland do not end there. Just as Her Majesty's Government set up a leak inquiry on the Solicitor-General's letter, when a Secretary of State—a former Home Secretary no less—knew well that he had authorised the leak, so other Ministers went through the motions of an inquiry into the loss of the logbook. They sent busy detectives on a wild goose chase to the West Indies when they knew perfectly well that the supposed suspect, the former supplies officer of HMS Conqueror, had left the Navy at least two months before the Government say that a logbook went missing. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) called it a "waste of police time". What would happen to the rest of us or our constituents if we wilfully squandered police time?

If I set out the facts as I see them, Ministers will be only too delighted to correct me if I am wrong. Ministers and/or the Director of Public Prosecutions required Detective Chief Superintendent Ron Hardy and Detective Sergeant Mike Ashdown to go to St. Lucia in the West Indies at a cost which eventually turned out to be £6,940·82. The figures come from the Solicitor-General's reply to me of 24 October 1985. [Vol. 84, c. 194.]

On Friday 8 February 1985 the two senior police detectives turned up in the St. Lucia harbour office of Lieutenant Mahendra Sethia, the former supplies officer of HMS Conquerer. His remarkable and well written diary features in Arthur Gavshon's unchallenged book "The Sinking of the Belgrano". Lieutenant Sethia had already been interviewed, not only by Mr. Hardy but by Rear-Admiral William Lang, Director of Naval Security, on Thursday 29 November 1984 in his office at the Ministry of Defence. Admiral Lang had a photocopy of the Sethia diary which had been given surreptitiously to the Ministry of Defence by the *Sunday Times*. I believe that it was unknown to the journalist of the *Sunday Times* to whom it had been entrusted as background material. Admiral Lang asked Sethia if he had stolen the control room log of the HMS Conqueror. Sethia forcefully denied that he had done any such thing.

Sethia was interviewed at New Scotland Yard by Mr. Hardy and Mr. Ashdown of the serious crimes squad on the same day, 29 November 1984, for over two hours. If they believed, which they probably did not, that Sethia had taken the control room logbook of the HMS Conqueror, why did Scotland Yard not take action there and then? Why did Ministers and the Director of Public Prosecutions send detectives to the West Indies, who may have been fed up with the whole inquiry? Was it because they thought that Sethia had the control room logbook? No. The former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), revealed in a reply to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower):

"It is clear that the logs were compiled and probably remained on board the submarine until October or November 1982."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. *593*.]

Sethia left the Navy in July 1982, and in September and October 1982 it was known by the Ministry of Defence that he was cruising around the coast of Europe on a 31 ft sailing boat. As the logs of the critical months, April and May 1982, had been bound together with the logs up to the end of 1982, how could Ministers and the DPP suspect him of stealing the logbooks? My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), who knows about such matters, is nodding in agreement. Do they suppose that Sethia furtively went back to HMS Conqueror when it returned to Devonport on 5 November 1982 to prepare for the refit which began on 17 January 1983?

I would like a comment from Sir Thomas Hetherington, a distinguished public servant, to whom I am sending a copy of this speech, because it appears that he inadvertently allowed himself to be used by politicians for their own nefarious purposes. Knowing what the Ministry of Defence did, the DPP authorised the scandalous waste of £6,940·82 of public funds. For clarity I shall outline the chronology of events.

On 7 November 1984, the headline in the *Daily Mirror* was "Belgrano Sensation: Killer sub's logbook missing". That was a front page exclusive by Paul Foot. At mid morning on 7 November 1984 the former Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley, gave evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee on the Belgrano inquiry. At 2.35 pm on that day the former Secretary of State for Defence answered the PNQ on the missing logbook, and the board of inquiry was set up.

On 8 November 1984, an opening date of the Ponting trial of 28 January 1985 was set.

On 29 November 1984 Lieutenant Sethia was first interviewed by Detective Chief Superintendent Hardy. He was questioned about the diary and the logbook.

On 30 November 1984, the former Defence Secretary disclosed in a written answer to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) that he had now referred the matter of the missing logbook to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In a separate written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), the former Defence Secretary disclosed that the matter of a diary kept by a member of the crew of Conqueror had also been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

On 7 January 1985, the Director of Public Prosecutions instructed Hardy and a colleague to travel to St. Lucia to interview Sethia again. On 28 January 1985, the Ponting trial opened. On 8 February 1985, Lieutenant Sethia was questioned in St. Lucia by Hardy and a colleague about the logbook and diary. On 10 February 1985, several Sunday newspapers reported the detectives' visit to the West Indies and *The Mail on Sunday* claimed that the logbook was "probably" recovered. The newspaper's blazing headline said "Conqueror logbook seized. Exclusive Belgrano breakthrough".

An article by crime correspondent Chester Stearn went on to claim that the logbook was "almost certainly back" in the hands of the police. It stated that "certain navigational books" from the Conqueror were said to have been recovered from "a former officer" on the submarine. Lieutenant Sethia was not mentioned by name. On 11 February 1985, Mr. Justice Sir Anthony McCowan concluded his summing up and Clive Ponting was acquitted.

I turn to the real reason why I believe two busy police officers were sent to the West Indies. The jury in the trial of Clive Ponting under the Official Secrets Act 1911 was about to be sent out to consider its verdict. The headlines would be full of another "traitor to the Government" being

brought to book. The cumulative effect of both stories on the public mind was not to be underestimated. At the Old Bailey, a "disloyal" civil servant was to be taught a lesson and, on the other side of the world, a "disloyal" naval officer was also to be taught a lesson.

As we now know, the British public, as represented by the men and women of the Ponting jury, were not so easily fooled. Thank goodness, British people as a cross-section can still recognise and reject outright Government lies when they see them.

When the decision was made to send those detectives to St. Lucia, it was known that all the events had been set in motion. It is in *Hansard*. The logbook was still there at the time. In a sense, Westland is an action replay of much of what we went through on the Belgrano.

I hope that my speech is read by the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It may be for him a matter of delicious irony that the victim of the leak of the Solicitor-General's letter was himself one of the ministerial instruments, if not the perpetrator—I believe that the perpetrator was in Downing street — of the bogus and expensive inquiry which was a waste of police and Civil Service time, no less than the Westland leak inquiry.

Using inquiries not to ascertain the truth but for political ends is demeaning to British public life. This morning, I listened, as did many others, to the former Secretary of State for Defence refer to

"the time when I was defending the Government's position on the Belgrano".

Much of it was impressive evidence. That is a long way from the debate on 18 February 1985.

The trouble is that the truth has to be chiselled out of the Government. In all that I have said I seek the views, first, of the Director of Public Prosecutions and, secondly, of the former Secretary of State for Scotland—the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger)—who I believe is an honourable man and who, as incoming Secretary of State for Defence, should take a fresh look at these events.

8.43 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Just over two years ago, I spoke during our annual Royal Navy debate and made something of a valedictory speech over the rapidly cooling corpse of the Royal Naval base and dockyard at Chatham. It was a well-received speech, and I certainly do not intend to use my few minutes going over old ground. That would, in any case, be graceless and churlish to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State who was so helpful at the time of the rundown at Chatham, and to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, who, in his previous incarnation in the Department of Trade and Industry, took decisions that are now bringing forth fruit. Phoenix is rising from the ashes. There will be life at Chatham and Gillingham after the departure of the Royal Navy.

The commercial dock, which opened shortly before the Navy left Chatham for the last time, turned over 500,000 tonnes of cargo in its first year, and 1 million tonnes of cargo in its second year and it expects in its third year to turn over 1·5 million tonnes. English Estates, which was appointed to redevelop Chatham, has begun to achieve in preparation for its redevelopment what world war two failed to do. It has flattened the site and it is now a green field, or at least a grey concrete, site. English Estates has signed up its first major tenant—a most worthy tenant for the former fine naval barracks of HMS Pembroke. The recently declared enterprise zone will be a fine catalyst to firms to locate at Chatham. The work of the Historic Dockyard Trust is at an early stage, but we have great hopes for the future.

The affection of the Medway towns for the Royal Navy is undiminished. The recent brief visit of a squadron of three minehunters was hailed as the return of a long lost and very dear friend. It is because of that great kinship that I feel moved to speak briefly this evening.

Last week, during the equivalent debate on the Army, I made what I hoped was a reasonably positive and helpful contribution. I fear that this evening I may be somewhat more critical of recent decisions concerning the Navy. I am worried by a series of newspaper articles in responsible papers which ask questions about the Navy's preparedness to face a conflict as limited even as the 1982 operation in the south Atlantic. I am the first to concede the inclination of defence correspondents to scaremonger and seek to dismay those of us who take an interest—albeit a lay interest—in defence matters.

I propose to say nothing about strategic deterrents—we have heard enough about Polaris and Trident—but instead I should like to articulate some misgivings about current naval procurement and recruitment. Much of my concern centres on the major ships of the surface fleet—the destroyers and frigates. I, too, am concerned at the slowness in ordering the eight type 23s. I understand that only one has been ordered but that three are to be ordered shortly. There is speculation that the original number of eight type 23s may be halved with the substitution of much smaller and cheaper patrol vessels. A very convincing case would have to be made if apprehension about the Navy's ability to fulfil its role is to be stilled.

The concern about delay and escalating costs of major defence contracts was highlighted in last summer's report by the Committee of Public Accounts. In connection with the tardiness in ordering the type 23 ships, I should like to associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) who so ably advocated the case for the S90 design for frigates. I shall be interested in the comments of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State on the arguments for and against the S90.

From looking forward to the ships of the near future, I should like to touch on the provision of better defences for existing major warships. If we learned anything from the Falklands conflict, it was that existing defences, especially on the type 42 ships, were woefully inadequate to deal with sea-skimming missiles, such as Exocet. It is more than three years since the Government pledged new equipment for 17 ships. Only two, as I understand it, have been so equipped, and as yet no decision has been taken on the type of defence to be provided for the assault ships, which it seems may be needed into the 21st century, and for the 12 sister ships to the Sheffield, the sinking of which was such a salutary lesson to us all.

Are we to buy more Vulcan-Phalanx guns? Are we to buy Goalkeeper? Are we able to defend these important ships against missiles with a British system? It is time that my right hon. and hon. Friends made up their minds.

A final thought in connection with our frigates and destroyers is prompted by today's report in the *Daily Telegraph* on the combined tanker, stores and workshop vessels for which Harland and Wolff and Swan Hunter

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have tendered. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will award this important contract soon, for these ships are vital to the viability of the type 23 ships under construction.

We are delighted by the orders announced on 3 January for Sting Ray, the three Upholder class submarines and the vital SSN. We hope that that may be an omen for this year and that we can expect that the logjam of naval procurement will be broken during the year.

I hope that, during our Royal Navy debate next year, we shall be able to applaud the wisdom of the procurement decisions that have been taken.

Another of my worries, which is just as pertinent to the fleet's competence and efficiency as procurement, is the recruitment, in particular, of officers. I understand that considerable pressure is arising because too few junior officers have been recruited since the 1981 defence review. Because an average of only 350 officers have been recruited in the past four years, we shall have to seek 800 per year for the forseeable future. Those are the words not of a mischievous defence correspondent but of the Director of Naval Recruiting in the Ministry of Defence.

That warning confirms my recent contacts with the Royal Navy, during which officers have confided their worry that a significant problem, especially in the older and smaller frigates, is now apparent. My right hon. and hon. Friends will appreciate, far better than I, the pressures of life at sea. Ships are now spending an unprecedented 50 per cent. of their time at sea. They will understand the changing social patterns which make prolonged and recurring periods at sea less attractive and acceptable than hitherto to wives and families. They will have had an opportunity to study increased attrition rates.

I should be grateful for my hon. Friend's assurance, when he replies, that he and his fellow Ministers have taken on board the dangerous position which will arise if the Navy continues to under-recruit officers. A shortage of junior officers now will manifest itself as a shortage of middle-ranking officers in 10 years time, and who knows, in a quarter of a century we may even be short of admirals.

My constituents' interest in the Royal Navy is not one of mawkish sentimentality born of the long naval tradition of the area. They see the Royal Navy as vital to this island nation's defence and completely symbolic of the Government's commitment to that defence.

I have asked questions tonight—not to be unhelpful, because that is not my way—which have been prompted by apparently responsible press reports reinforced by recent contacts with the Navy. I look forward to my hon. Friend reassuring me and proving that my fears are groundless.

8.52 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): As someone associated with the fishing industry, I naturally have a great deal of respect and admiration for the Royal Navy. I shall always remember the equanimity and resilience displayed by the sailors and officers of the frigates involved in the United Kingdom-Icelandic fisheries disputes. Ships and men were placed in an almost impossible position by the stupidly short-sighted policies of Tory and Labour Governments. The crews of those frigates earned the deep gratitude of British fishermen and their families for the protection that they gave to our trawlers during those foolishly futile fishery disputes with the Icelanders.

The Royal Navy appears to be bedevilled by a defence procurement policy that Walpole might have called a heap of contradictions and incoherence. Before discussing the pantomine of a defence procurement policy, I shall bring to the Minister's attention and that of the House a matter that deeply worries some of my constituents. I have already mentioned it to the Minister informally. I am deeply grateful for the courteous reaction that he has always shown to delegations of shop stewards from my constituency and myself. I only wish that he could match that marvellous courtesy with generous orders for my shipyards.

The anxiety centres upon fears of radiation-induced illness amongst employees at the Royal Navy armaments depot at Coulport. Is the Minister satisfied with safety standards at Faslane and Coulport? Has exposure to radiation at Coulport remained below internationally recognised safety limits? Are the small teams of men that fasten the warheads to the missiles at Coulport subject to, or protected by, the most stringent safety regulations? Is an examination of the safety regulations and radiation levels at Coulport being conducted by the Health and Safety Executive? If so, will the Ministry of Defence publish the report produced by that group of investigators? I hope that the Minister will give me some assurances on those matters.

I called the Government's defence procurement policy a heap of contradictions. One general point about it is that it favours the "deep south" of England. Last week's *New Society* stated:

"Defence expenditure has become the main regionally selective government assistance to industry. Between 1978-79 and 1983-84, defence spending increased by over a quarter in real terms. By contrast, total public expenditure grew by only 7 per cent. It is significant that one of Michael Heseltine's last acts before he resigned as Defence Secretary over the Westland row was to direct a contract for three diesel electric submarines to Liverpool . . . All the same, most domestic defence procurement takes place in lowland England".

Perhaps the Government have written off Scotland. What is plain is that Scotland has written off the Tory party. Recent opinion polls in Scotland show the Tories trailing in fourth place behind the Scottish National party. The Tories are a minority party today in Scotland.

The submarine orders for Vickers-Cammell Laird clearly reveal the contradictory nature of the Government's defence and industrial policies. On 26 November 1985, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement told the House:

"It is the Government's intention that there should be a number of submarine builders in this country, just as there are at present. Vickers has a monopoly not of conventional but of nuclear submarines. We envisage that there will be plenty of competition for conventional submarines".—[*Official Report*, 26 November 1985; Vol. 87, c. 735.]

The decision of the then Secretary of State to award a contract for three conventional submarines to Vickers-Cammell Laird gave the company a monopoly of conventional and nuclear submarine construction. In a letter I sent to the Minister I said that in my view he had misled the House on 26 November 1985. However, I accept the Minister's word—he is an honourable man—that he did not mislead the House on that occasion. In a reply dated 13 January 1986, he said:

"I cannot accept your assertion that I have in some way misled the House. The order for the three Upholder class conventional

submarines . . . was placed as a result of a competition, with the order going to the yard which offered the best terms and conditions. It would have been more expensive to split the order."

His letter again shows the heap of contradictions in procurement policy. Clearly the decision to place the contract with Vickers-Cammell Laird is a plain and simple attempt to lengthen the order book immediately prior to privatisation. It certainly places Cammell Laird at Birkenhead in a much more appealing light.

The Minister said in his letter that the orders went to the company that offered the best terms and conditions. It would have been more expensive to split the order. In a letter to me, he said:

"Bids from the three companies who tendered were close, but Cammell Laird offered significantly the best value for money to the Ministry of Defence overall."

However, this benchmark, these criteria, were not applied to a recent contract for two frigates. If value for money were the sole criterion, both vessels would have been ordered from Vosper Thornycroft. In fact, the then Secretary of State for Defence decided to save jobs at Cammell Laird and awarded one of the frigates to that yard.

In a statement to the House of Commons in January 1985 the then Secretary of State said:

"The cheapest solution from the point of defence procurement would be to place the order for both ships with one yard, but, in the light of the wider and relevant factors involved, I have decided that an order for one type 22 frigate will be placed with Cammell Laird and for the second with Swan Hunter, and I am prepared to authorise the necessary expenditure."

This is important because he went on to say:

"This offers the prospect of the survival of Cammell Laird as a major warship builder; without such a contract the yard would have closed. I hope that the yard will succeed in obtaining other business in the short as well as the long term."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1985; Vol. 72, c. 21.]

In an editorial entitled "Sentimental Heseltine", the *Daily Telegraph* said:

"The decision of Mr. Michael Heseltine to divide the order for two Type 22 frigates between Swan Hunter of Tyneside and Cammell Laird of Birkenhead is easy to understand. Although it would make financial sense to build both ships at Swan Hunter because of economies of scale and because it is a more efficient yard than its Merseyside counterpart, the Secretary of State for Defence was influenced by the 'wider and relevant factors' . . . Mr. Heseltine may well have had additional sentimental reasons for granting Cammell Laird a reprieve."

With regard to the three submarine orders, it is to his shame that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) felt no sentimental concern for Scotland and Scottish shipyard workers. His sentimentality took him no further north than Birkenhead. I have to say with respect that it is a great pity that the right hon. Gentleman did not resign three or four months earlier. Had he done so, his successor the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) might well have followed his earlier decision, with these "wider factors," and awarded a contract to Scott Lithgow for one of the submarines. This confused, biased and confusing procurement policy has inflicted severe damage upon my constituency which has at present a male unemployment rate in excess of 26·5 per cent. It is a scandalous state of affairs. I sincerely hope that the new Secretary of State for Defence shows some concern, sentimental or otherwise, for the work force and management of Scott Lithgow. In the short run he can best demonstrate that concern by advancing the orders promised to this yard for a range mooring vessel and two powered mooring barges. He could also in the medium term award a contract to Scott Lithgow for an aviation support ship.

Finally, it is very plain to me that the operative factors are not identical in all instances of warship contracts. When considered desirable or necessary, Ministers at the Ministry of Defence simply re-write the rules. Given the habitual reluctance of Departments to disclose fully and openly the factors determining decision-making, it is impossible for a Back-Bencher, and perhaps even a Select Committee, to determine how decisions are reached. That is a great shame.

One factor that encouraged real change was the Falklands campaign. With regard to shipyards today, it would appear that the overriding factor is the privatisation drive.

9.4 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): It is good that we continue to retain single service debates. It allows us to deal in detail with items which are not necessarily appropriate when we discuss the defence Estimates, and it is a morale booster for the services that want their individual service debated properly and fully.

I shall deal with three matters which have been covered only partially by hon. Members earlier — damage control, spares provision aboard warships, and encouragement for co-operation between the Ministry of Defence and the happily denationalised warship yards in attracting warship orders from overseas.

Since 1983 I have had the good fortune to visit four warships—HMS Illustrious, a type 42, a type 21, and a type 22—and in a few weeks time I hope to go aboard an OPV. Each time I have noted an increasing emphasis on damage control. The lessons that had been dangerously forgotten since the second world war and which have been relearned since the Falklands campaign are now being put increasingly into practice. My right hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that during the second world war more ships were lost because of inadequate damage control procedures than directly due to enemy action. During the Falklands campaign we had frightening instances of ships burning, of men dressed in plastic or terylene overalls being extremely badly burnt, and of plastic burning and producing noxious gases aad thick smoke. When I visited HMS Brazen yesterday I was particularly pleased to see a ship that was better designed and equipped for carrying out damage control than the type 21 or type 42, and that gave considerable emphasis to damage control training aboard ship.

Will my right hon. Friend ensure that all men on warships have clothing made of pure cotton, and that there are no terylene overalls, number eights or action working dress? Will he or his Department consult the captain of HMS Brazen? When the men were practising damage control they were using modified steel pit props. That seemed to be a better idea than using wooden shoring. All hon. Members will have experienced a heavy London smog. It is quite frightening and disorientating. I have done two damage control training courses, one in Australia and the other in the United Kingdom. One must go inside a metal cabin which is on fire, one's breathing apparatus is removed, and one cannot see anything. One must first control oneself and fight down the panic. It is desperately important that we provide every man with a personal breathing apparatus so that if he is caught inside a ship in

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thick, acrid smoke, he can cover his head, breathe and control his panic. That will permit him to operate as an effective fighting unit.

Regarding the provision of spares, I know that warships are getting Oasis, although HMS Brazen did not have it, and other comparable automated systems for ordering spares. Meanwhile, however, some items are in short supply, as many naval officers and senior ratings have told me all too often. These are often minor items, but as a consequence the system does not work or it works considerably below optimum because of a failure to deliver spare parts or because items fail faster than expected. Until Oasis or a similar system is working properly, I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that he should send a simple questionnaire to all warships in service. There are no more than 100 warships in operation at any one time.

Mr. Denzil Davies: What navy is that?

Mr. Sayeed: There are no more than 100 RN warships in operation at any one time. The questionnaire should ask each head of department — executive, supply and secretariat, marine engineering and weapons electrical— two questions. First, they should list the main five items where shortages have caused or are causing operational problems. The second question would be to list the three items with which they believe the ship is over-supplied. They should state how many of the over-supplied items they have and how long it would take to use up that number at the current rate of consumption.

If the Ministry of Defence says that it does not have the personnel to handle this simple exercise, then I make my right hon. Friend an offer that he cannot refuse. If my right hon. Friend will reconfirm my security clearance and invest me with the authority to act, I will write to the warships and when I get the answers I shall collate them for him. I believe that these answers will show one thing clearly — that important operational inefficiencies are occurring because of a lack of a number of minor spares. Steps could be taken to correct that and thus increase the operating efficiency of the fleet. The questionnaire would also show that warships are holding spares that they do not need or want and which are taking up valuable space.

I believe that the Ministry of Defence should co-operate with the newly denationalised warship yards in promoting the sale of warships overseas. The Ministry of Defence should suggest to these yards that they design a warship — a frigate or a destroyer or even an OPV. The shipyards should design it—not Bath—in a form which they believe will be attractive to overseas buyers. The dockyards could build this new warship and then the Navy could borrow it and operate it as a shop window. The Navy could go around the world showing friendly powers how well we can build ships, and cheaply at that.

The warship yards may or may not like the idea but it is worth exploring the concept. We have the expertise in the warship yards and the Navy is a superb ambassador. It would be little skin off the Ministry of Defence's nose to provide the sailors. The Royal Navy could evaluate a much simpler form of warship and we may thus avoid the argument about the merits of S90s or type 23s. If the dockyards believe they can sell an S90 overseas, let them build one and allow the Navy to operate it as a floating shop window.

I will not deal with the defence policy of the Labour party. It does not know what it wants and its policy makes no sense at all. The Social Democratic party has perpetuated an insidious con trick by suggesting that cruise-carrying submarines can provide a viable alternative to Trident.

To provide even minimal deterrence, we would have to have many times the present number of cruise-carrying submarines. The Social Democratic party would reduce defence expenditure, but it is unable to say where the money for all these extra submarines would come from. To illustrate why it is necessary to have more cruise-carrying submarines one just has to note that the range of cruise is 1,500 nautical miles whereas Trident has a range of 4,500 nautical miles, which gives submarines much more room to hide in. The SDP forgets that cruise is a single missile and that Trident is a multiple re-entry vehicle. It forgets that cruise is subsonic and can be taken out by aircraft whereas there is no technology yet which can intercept Trident re-entry vehicles.

I should have liked to develop my argument, but I am aware of the constraints of time. I hope that I shall get some answers from my hon. Friend the Minister.

9.15 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I shall not waste the valuable minutes at my disposal by answering the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed). I propose to pick up some of the issues that have already been raised and to develop some of them which concern the city of Portsmouth and the Royal Navy's involvement with it.

As for air-sea rescue and Lee-on-the-Solent, it would be stupid even to consider removing that facility from HMS Daedalus. It serves a population of several million people—residents and visitors—during a year. The local newspaper and other hon. Members who supported its retention should be congratulated.

My colleague, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) talked about the school of music. What he said would enjoy universal support in Portsmouth, which was badly savaged by the Nott cuts of 1981. The cost of moving to Deal has doubled. I have written to the new Secretary of State and I hope that the matter can be reconsidered, especially with regard to Eastney. It is logical for naval bands to stay there, even if that is not true for all defence bands.

Will the Minister give us an answer about the future of Fleetlands — the largest helicopter repair facility in Europe? The work force there is nervous about the future, about whether it has one and whether any future lies in Government ownership or private ownership, and whether it will be sold off to Sikorsky.

I recently had a short voyage on one of Her Majesty's ships and I should like to describe the feeling of men serving on it, and of people in Portsmouth. Morale is not high in the Navy. The figures speak for themselves. There has been a 37 per cent. increase in the number of ratings and officers wanting to come out of the Navy between 1983 and 1985. There has been a fall, despite a figure of 3·5 million unemployed, in the number of people wanting to enter the service, whether as officers or as ratings. We must ask what is wrong in the Navy.

In one section of a type 42 destroyer, all 14 men had put in their notice to leave the Navy within 18 months. Many of them spoke of their problems—too long at sea, undermanning, the difficulties of sea training and

problems at home. None of them was happy, but all were incredibly proud to be in the Navy. Other hon. Members have talked about the pride of serving members of the Navy and those who have left and their ability to serve the community. Although they are immensely proud, many are sick at how the Navy is operating.

It is ironic that, while we can spend £2·8 million refurbishing the officers' mess at HMS Nelson, in my city there are 37 able seamen to a mess on a type 42 destroyer. Such conditions are a disgrace in 1986. We must question the suitability of some of the things that are happening on those ships. The Fleet Air Arm has insufficient facilities for flying time, because of restrictions on fuel and the economies that it is forced to make. The exercises of one of Her Majesty's ships are not carried out with the Fleet Air Arm or the Royal Air Force, but with private commercial pilots brought in to fly sorties over our ships to provide the required expertise and training. Live rounds of ammunition cannot be fired at seaborne targets because of the cost involved. That adds up to a restrictive use of facilities.

Radar is shifted from ship to ship, because of the lack of sophisticated new equipment to go round. That all undermines the morale of the Navy at rating and officer level.

Many hon. Members have quoted figures about the merchant service. Is it permissible for this House to allow that service to diminish? In details passed to me recently it was interesting to note that the British Fern and the British Ivy were requisitioned during the Falklands war to take cargoes to Ascension Island, only to be recalled to Gibraltar because the Indian Government objected to Indian nationals serving on ships involved in the conflict. The cargoes had to be offloaded at Gibraltar and transported to Ascension Island by other ships.

Is it right to undermine the merchant service support that is undoubtedly required by the Royal Navy? Many hon. Members have spoken about a reduction on the Channel services when the Channel tunnel is built. Have we really considered the effects of that?

In Portsmouth and the greater Portsmouth area there are 650 empty naval houses. That is a small point, but it is important to service personnel when there are 5,000 people waiting for houses. Something must be done about those empty properties because it is a disgrace and a stigma on the service establishment in that area. If naval lands are not to be used, let us have some of them. The Navy owns 1,200 hectares of land in the greater Portsmouth area. Much of that land has only anchors and chains on it. If naval lands are not to be used, decisions should be made quickly so that they can be released. I make a special plea for the Fraser gun range at Eastney. Please make a decision so that Portsmouth can plan for some of its needs.

I am sorry that I had such a short time to discuss such a big subject for my area. I regret that bitterly. I should have especially liked to develop the arguments about Navy morale and the need for us to support it. There are serious problems and I do not believe that the Government have the policies to put the fibre and fabric of the Navy back together to give Britain the type of Navy we have come to expect and to want.

9.22 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): This is the second of the three annual services debates in the House. Last week we debated the Army, and tonight we are debating the Navy. In last week's debate and tonight, an underlying concern has been expressed about whether it will be possible to fund even the defence expenditure that the Government have set out in their various documents and in the public expenditure White Paper.

As was said last week, the defence budget is gradually getting out of control. Difficult problems must be faced. We should remember the defence review of 1981 under a previous Secretary of State, Sir John Nott. If that review had been carried through, the Royal Navy would have been reduced to a coastal defence force. That review was against the background of the Government's decision to buy Trident mark 1 from the Americans. In those days, the estimated cost of Trident mark 1 was about £5,000 million.

Since then, the Government have decided to purchase Trident mark 2, because the Americans will stop producing the mark 1. On present estimates, mark 2 will cost £9·5 billion. I do not say that the mark 2 is twice as expensive as the mark 1, because inflation must be taken into account, but on 1981 figures, Trident mark 2 would probably have cost about £7·5 billion, which was way in excess of the estimated cost of the mark 1.

The Nott defence review was conducted against the background of purchasing Trident mark 1. It was stopped largely as a result of the Falklands war, although Chatham dockyard was closed and Portsmouth was substantially run down and is no longer a dockyard. Apart from those economies, if they can be called that, most of the proposed cuts under the Nott review were restored as a result of the Falklands war and the lessons learnt from it.

The present position mirrors the position before the Nott review in 1981, with the addition of a more expensive Trident and the fact that, during the next few years, the cost of Trident will escalate rapidly within a defence budget which will not increase and which, on the figures, looks as though it will decrease during the next three years. There is a real danger that the brunt of the cuts will fall upon the Royal Navy, as they were intended to fall upon the Navy in Sir John Nott's analysis of the position in 1981.

The 50-warship, destroyer and frigate Navy to which the Government are committed is extremely important not only to the armed services but to the future of our warship yards and to employment in many parts of Britain. During the next 10 years, frigates will have to be ordered at least at twice the rate that they have been ordered since 1979. If that is not done, the Navy faces the prospect of operating an increasingly aged fleet of destroyers and frigates, with increasing maintenance costs and diminished effectiveness. The maximum useful life of a warship is about 22 years. To secure in 10 years' time a force of destroyers and frigates within the 22-year life span, the Government would have to order another 17, and orders would have to be placed within the next six years. During the six years since they came to power, the Government have placed nine orders for new frigates, but four of those were replacements for ships lost in the Falklands; the resources for them came not from the normal defence budget but from the special fund that the Treasury allowed to the Ministry of Defence to make good war losses in the Falklands.

Against that background, and the effect of the failure to order frigates from companies such as Swan Hunter, we are anxious not only about the Navy but, as my hon.

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Friends the Members for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) and Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said, that jobs and skills should not be lost in our warship yards.

When the type 23 frigate was first thought of in 1981 or 1982, against the background of the closure of Chatham, it was considered to be a throwaway frigate that would not be refitted. This may be history now, but it is worth examining a quotation from the Secretary of State in a debate on 25 June 1981, which was repeated in the Navy debate on 19 July 1982:

"Secondly, we can maintain our surface fleet at its present full strength only through a continuous programme of refits and major mid-life modernisations, requiring a huge and costly dockyard infrastructure. Typically it can now cost up to £70 million to modernise an old Leander frigate, which is actually more than our target cost for the new type 23 frigate."—[*Official Report*, 19 July 1982; Vol. 28, c. 58.]

There was some doubt about the figure of £70 million. It is questionable whether that is a correct figure for the refit of a Leander frigate.

At that time, the cost of a type 23 frigate was £60 million. That frigate was to be thrown away—it would not be refitted or modernised. It was against that background that Chatham was closed, Gibraltar was scheduled to close and Portsmouth ceased to be a dockyard.

I do not know the current target estimate for a type 23 frigate, although I understand it to be between £110 million and £120 million, depending on what is put on it. It surely cannot be a throwaway frigate any longer; I cannot believe that is will be disposed of. There may be questions about future dockyard capacity and we may face problems because of the background to that new frigate.

We have debated the dockyards fully—although not more than fully because it is an important subject, as the Minister understands. I listened with interest to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who said that he had read all the speeches. Without any disrespect to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), perhaps we should have had the benefit of the presence of the right hon. Member for Devonport on the Committee—he would not then have had to read the speeches, he could have spoken on an important matter concerning his constituency. However, he did not avail himself of that opportunity.

Several hon. Members have spoken about merchant shipping—notably my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend and the right hon. Members for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) and for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart). I make no apology for returning to that subject. This year we have heard nothing from the Government to allay our fears about the dangerous decline of the merchant fleet, and the consequences upon the availability of seamen and ships for the Royal Navy.

The Government's figures are extremely optimistic. As the Select Committee on Defence said in its first report of 1984-85, the figures are dependent upon a theoretical view of the availability of ships. I understand that, in theory, there are three categories of requisition or availability—United Kingdom owned and registered ships; United Kingdom registered ships—apparently owned in British dependent territories, of which there are still a few left—and flagged out ships that are United Kingdom beneficially owned.

Perhaps there is no problem with requisitioning United Kingdom owned and registered ships. In theory, there should also be no problem with United Kingdom registered ships. However, the Committee points out quite reasonably in paragraph 19:

"Nevertheless, if the vessels remain on the registers of the United Kingdom or dependent territories the application of the prerogative power is clear. In the case of the dependent territories, the ability to requisition may be subject to political constraints."

That may cause a problem with the number of ships that we can obtain.

In the third category of flagged out ships, the Committee states in paragraph 20:

"We cannot be confident that, say, a Panama flag ship owned by a Panamanian registered company could be relied upon for requisition."

The figures are, therefore, extremely optimistic. The Government have not really taken on board the seriousness of the decline of the merchant fleet.

I have some sympathy with the MOD, because it is not the lead Department in this matter. It used to be the Department of Trade and Industry, but that responsibility has now been passed to the Secretary of State for Transport. Whatever one may say about that right hon. Gentleman, he has not shown great enthusiasm for Government intervention in the market place.

The answer in the case of the Merchant Navy does not lie with the Department of Defence but, as the right hon. Member for Taunton said, with a national maritime policy. Under the Government, we have no national policy on anything, and until somebody agrees that the Government must intervene in the market place, nothing will happen, because decisions on merchant shipping will be based on commercial, financial and taxation decisions. The Government will have to decide on these matters and intervene if we are to stop the decline and ensure that we have a merchant fleet that can support the Royal Navy.

We have not had any satisfactory answers about assault ships from the Government. As we know, assault ships were to have gone. Before General Galtieri invaded the Falklands, such ships were to go to the Nott's knackers yard, but they were reprieved as a result of the Falklands. However, a decision on them must be taken, and I hope that the Government will end the uncertainty before long and tell us that they are to be replaced. They have an important role to play in Norway especially, because of our commitment through the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy in that part of NATO's defence. I hope that we can be told something more by the Under-Secretary.

We have three carriers but only two crews and only two lots of aeroplanes, fixed and rotor wing. It is no good saying that we can swap the crews over so that when one carrier is being refitted, the crew is taken from one carrier and put on another. There are problems in such a system, such as keeping sailors at sea for a long time and their morale. This is not a satisfactory way to go about such things.

There is the question of torpedoes, which are——

Mr. Franks: There is the question of Trident.

Mr. Davies: I shall be coming to the hon. Gentleman's rather excitable speech—he should not be excited any more. The visits of my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) are having an effect up there in Barrow and we shall continue to go up there and preach the message that the Royal Navy needs hunter-killer

submarines and under a Labour Government we shall be able to afford to put crews on them. The hon. Gentleman should take that message back to Barrow, and if he does not, we shall. He knows that he will have great difficulties in the next election.

Neither the Government nor the NATO strategies have resolved the problem of what to do with the Navy. The issue came to the fore in John Nott's review, and it is still there. If the intention is that war in central Europe, should it come, is to last for seven to eight days and then we shall go nuclear, there are questions about the role of the Royal Navy. If, on the other hand, the war is not to go nuclear, and remains conventional, the role of the Navy is different, especially in the eastern Atlantic.

These issues must be resolved, but the Government have not resolved them, nor the issues of the budget and how to pay for a proper Navy as well as paying for Trident, which they cannot do. These issues will come back in the Defence Estimates and will have to be faced by the Government sooner or later.

9.39 pm

The Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): It gives me great pleasure to close this year's Navy debate. Before dealing with the specific topics that have occupied the attention of right hon. and hon. Members, I should like to address the main thrust of today's debate, defence expenditure, and within that naval expenditure. The Navy budget, in common with the defence budget as a whole, has benefited from an unprecedented period of sustained real growth. This is reflected in the size of the shipbuilding programme over the past seven years.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said earlier that since May 1979 this Government have ordered 50 warships, whose total value is equivalent to about £3,600 million at 1985-86 price levels. This figure included nine nuclear and conventionally powered submarines, nine frigates and 21 mine counter vessels of three different classes. There are 28 vessels currently at various stages of construction, with a value approaching £3 billion. The Government can be justifiably proud of their record of support for the Royal Navy. It is now much better equipped all round than it would have been if expenditure had been maintained in real terms at 1978-79 levels.

In 1984-85 our sea systems expenditure in the United Kingdom industry was approximately £1,870 million. This directly employed about 70,000 people; indirectly it employed a further 50,000 people. These figures exclude any Ministry of Defence personnel.

The remarks made in the Army debate last week by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) are beginning to haunt him. I repeat the quotation:

"by cancelling Trident, we can maintain present levels of conventional defence spending."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 1127.]

The Opposition have made no secret of their eagerness to cancel Trident. However, until now, as I understood their position, their intention had been to switch over resources to make some enhancements to the conventional capability. Now it appears that, not content with throwing away the ultimate guarantee of this nation's security, the right hon. Gentleman does not intend even to compensate for this by increasing the orders for conventional forces.

When the right hon. Member for Llanelli and the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) visited Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering at Barrow they endeavoured to reassure the work force, whose livelihood in the latter part of this decade depends upon Trident and who are naturally apprehensive about Labour party policy, that although the Labour party would cancel Trident the yard's future would be safeguarded by additional semi-submersible nuclear orders. My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) asked where the right hon. Gentleman would produce the money from for this if, as he has said in the House, he intends to cancel Trident and to maintain only existing levels of conventional defence spending.

Without wishing to be too cruel to the right hon. Gentleman, he must suffer enough from the cross that he has to bear of his party's defence policy. I remind him again of the point made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement when he wound up last week's debate. My hon. Friend highlighted the yawning gap between the right hon. Gentleman's statement that conventional defence spending is inadequate and the statement of his Front Bench colleague the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) who confirmed that Labour would not have increased defence spending by 3 per cent. a year between 1979 and 1985, as this Government did. How does the right hon. Gentleman explain that? Where will the money for defence come from under a Labour Administration—that question has to be asked—on top of the increased spending on education, pensions, the National Health Service, roads, the youth training scheme, overseas aid and industry? Name it and the nation's cheque book will be available. Cash appears to be no object at all.

It is a bit much for the Opposition to go on about the supposed inadequacy of this Government's spending. When we came to power we inherited the lowest level of defence spending in real terms since just after the Korean war. We have increased it substantially. We have concentrated the increase on the conventional forces that were left in such a sorry and demoralised state by the last Labour Government. The truth is that the Labour party's defence policy is bogus, intellectually dishonest and just does not add up, in either military or financial terms.

I say to those Opposition Members who represent shipbuilding constituencies — the hon. Members for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman)—that we understand their concern over their constituents' interests. Sadly, there is a substantial over-capacity in our warship building yards. I hear what Opposition Members say in this House but I do not often hear similiar speeches from Opposition Members in favour of increased defence expenditure at Labour party conferences.

Opposition Members, including the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), made much of the impact of Trident upon the rest of the defence programme and the dire consequences for the conventional navy of Trident. This is, of course, nonsense. It is a well-managed programme. There has been no real increase in the estimate for Trident D5 since it was first announced. The differences are entirely due to inflation and exchange rate movement.

In that context I remind the House of the words of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who

[Mr. John Lee]

sadly is not with us this evening, but who knows a great deal more about the Royal Navy than many Opposition Members. On the Second Reading of the Dockyards Services Bill the hon. Gentleman said:

"What kind of Navy are we likely to have in the late 1980s and 1990s? Clearly it will be a mixed Navy of surface and sub-surface vessels. Though I may hold different views from others about the degree of mix that should exist, it is clear that, despite the difficulties of financing Trident, we shall have a Navy with a substantial surface component along with a sub-surface component." [*Official Report*, 2 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 58.]

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) is a member of the Select Committee on Defence and that is why he is absent.

Mr. Lee: I appreciate that information from the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West is correct. Alongside Trident, there will indeed be a Navy with substantial surface and sub-surface components. Opposition Members would do well to heed those words from one of their colleagues.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have heeded the Under-Secretary of State's words and it all sounds very reassuring. Can the Under-Secretary now give us a firm commitment to the placement of the No. 2, No. 3 and No. 4 type 23 warships and also a sound decision on the two auxiliary vessels which are in contention between Swan Hunter and Harland and Wolff?

Mr. Lee: I shall discuss specific procurement matters shortly.

I would like to put the costs of Trident into context. Trident will cost, over its 20-year life, approximately one half of the total defence budget in one year. For that expenditure we shall get our ultimate strategic deterrent for well into the next century.

As for competition in naval procurement, it is Ministry of Defence policy to place warship contracts, wherever practicable, by competitive tendering. That policy has achieved keen prices ranging from the major order for Upholder class submarines, placed on 3 January, to orders for smaller craft. As for the Upholder class diesel-electric submarine, the order for a batch of type 24-00 submarines placed as a result of competition gave a saving of about £20 million. Almost one half of that figure was due to competition and the rest to batch ordering.

Recent examples of orders for smaller craft where competition has been especially fierce and where MOD obtained savings compared with original estimates included four ramped craft logistics for the Army and 71 of the 5.5 motorboats for the Royal Navy.

Competition, often in conjunction with other factors such as technological advances, has also provided some significant savings in the area of naval weapons. As an example, we are obtaining savings on unit production costs of new sonars which are typically between 10 and 30 per cent. less in real terms than the cost of the equipment that they replace. At the same time, advances in technology ensure that they are considerably more capable than the equipment they replace.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members raised the question of escort numbers. We are continuing our programme of construction of the highly effective type 22 and type 23s to replace the older type 21 and Leander class frigates. The order for the last two type 22s was placed in January last year. Construction of the first class 23, HMS Norfolk, is proceeding satisfactorily. We are currently evaluating tenders for the first follow-on vessels of this class. Subject to agreement on price, we intend, as the House is aware, to order type 23-02 from Swan Hunter.

It will be some time before we will be able to make an announcement on the outcome of the competition for type 23-03 and 23-04. Broadly, it remains the Government's intention to order approximately three type 23 frigates a year. Nevertheless our future plans, as always, are subject to the availability of resources and the House will appreciate that these are exceedingly tight.

Dr. Godman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lee: I shall give way in a moment.

I can assure the House, and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), that there has been no change in the Government's intention to maintain a force of about 50 escort vessels.

Dr. Godman: What is the likelihood of Yarrow winning one of the orders for this type of surface vehicle?

Mr. Lee: With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, it would be wholly inappropriate for me to answer that question. Competition has to be won on the basis of merit and I certainly cannot make comments on particular yards like Yarrow.

Mr. O'Neill: I am almost reassured by what the Minister is saying, but I ask him to be more specific about the rate of ordering, which we shall have to treble if we are to sustain a 50-warship Navy beyond 1990. Has the hon. Gentleman given thought to that? What is the Government's view on that?

Mr. Lee: I can only repeat that we shall be ordering at the rate of broadly three vessels a year. I stand by what I have said. However, that will be subject to the budget.

Mr. Garrett: The Minister's announcement will be accepted with quiet satisfaction on Tyneside. However, I ask the hon. Gentleman to make a statement on the prospect of the order for the auxiliary oil replenishment vessel.

Mr. Lee: I was about to turn to that matter. The AOR was mentioned by the hon. Member for Wallsend and by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). Tenders have been received for the design and build of the first two "one-stop" auxiliary oil replenishment vessels and they are currently being evaluated. Two shipyards have tendered for the design-and-build package, and these are Swan Hunter and Harland and Wolff. It is intended that the AOR will provide simultaneous replenishment at sea of liquids and solids. It will replace the ageing Royal Fleet Auxiliary. No decisions have been taken on the size and timing of orders.

It will be of interest to those who represent shipbuilding constituencies that there is the certainty now of a refit for Britannia. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces paid tribute in his opening remarks to the recent exploits of Her Majesty's yacht Britannia and its crew in the Red sea, and I wish to associate myself with his remarks.

The House will be aware that Britannia is over 30 years old. If the yacht is to continue in service for the next 10 to 15 years, we intend to have it refitted during 1987. We

are considering inviting commercial tenders for this work later this year, which will ensure that we obtain the best value for money.

Mr. Garrett: Will the Minister give an assurance that when commercial tendering takes place for the refitting of the royal yacht it will be on the basis that the work will be done in the United Kingdom and not in a foreign yard?

Mr. Lee: I can give the categoric assurance that Britannia will be refitted in the United Kingdom.

A number of hon. Members mentioned amphibious shipping, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best). We have referred on several occasions to the wide-ranging studies that we have been undertaking with industry with the aim of properly examining our future fitness capability when the current ships begin to be phased out in the mid-1990s. The studies were initiated well in advance of the need to commence detailed design work, thus providing the opportunity to examine exhaustively all aspects of our future requirements and all militarily viable options. We expect to make a decision on the best way forward later this year.

Mr. Best: Is it right that the joint Chiefs of Staff have recommended total replacement of HMS Fearless and Intrepid with a view to enhancing our amphibious warfare capability?

Mr. Lee: With great respect, it would be entirely improper for me to comment on service advice that has been rendered.

In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred to the Sea Harrier. Hon. Members will know that we are planning a mid-life update for the aircraft to maintain its ability to counter the threat for which it was originally designed until about the end of the century. The project definition contract with British Aerospace for the mid-life update was referred to in paragraph 439 of last year's statement on the Defence Estimates, albeit somewhat opaquely, and it has now been completed. As part of the mid-life update work, we are proceeding with the development of a new radar system for the aircraft. We hope to take a decision to proceed to full development of the mid-life update programme later this year.

No naval debate would be complete without the contribution—I say this in the nicest way—of my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) on hydrography and the merchant fleet. My right hon. Friend is not quite as persistent as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is on the defence school of music, but he is a regular contributor to these debates. As he knows, I visited Taunton last year and witnessed the fine work that is done by the Hydrographer for the Royal Navy. The hydrographic department continues to provide invaluable service to seafarers generally.

The survey flotilla once again demonstrated its versatility with HMS Hydra's involvement in the evacuation from Aden. The new coastal survey vessel, HMS Roebuck, should be in service later this year. We clearly have a continuing requirement to carry out ocean survey work around the globe. This work can be done by royal naval survey vessels or by civilian experts working under the control of the MOD. The balance between those three resources must depend upon their relative cost-effectiveness. When we have more experience of contract and charter survey work we plan to undertake a review of the future size and shape of the survey flotilla.

The subject of merchant shipping was mentioned by a whole host of hon. Members, not only my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton but the hon. Member for Clackmannan and the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart). We have always recognised that merchant shipping is a vital defence resource and, as stated in last year's statement on the Defence Estimates, it plays an important role in our planning when considering our national requirements and NATO obligations. Those commitments require the use of merchant ships of a wide variety of types. The recent decline in the overall size of the United Kingdom merchant fleet has been monitored closely by the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport because we are aware that if the decline continues for several more years at the present rate, it would become increasingly difficult to discharge some of our NATO obligations. However, currently there are sufficient United Kingdom merchant ships available to meet our foreseen defence needs. The exception to that, as has been said, is certain types of trawlers for minesweeping duties. Studies are in hand to find alternative ways of meeting that requirement. Those studies will be completed in the spring.

I fully appreciate and understand the concern of my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton but I implore him not to exaggerate the situation. He specifically talked about the Falklands operation. He is entitled to his view but I have to say that the Ministry of Defence believes that, in the unlikely event of another Falklands-type scenario, we could man a similar exercise. That is our considered view.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) referred to the subject of hoverships. The Ministry of Defence has been taking a close interest in new ship technologies but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we do not currently see an operational role for such craft.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton expresses concern over the future of HMS Endurance. That ship will undergo a major refit later this year and the work will give her an economic life extending into the mid-1990s. As that will allow her to continue her pattern of deployment in the Atlantic during this period, it would be premature to talk about a replacement.

I heard what the hon. Member for Linlithgow said on the matter of HMS Conqueror's logbook. Obviously, my Department and the new Secretary of State will read in *Hansard* what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Ministry of Defence reply to me as soon as possible if there are any mistakes of fact?

Mr. Lee: I shall certainly bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I cannot go any further than that tonight. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that.

I shall look into the matter raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow about the allegation, or suggestion, of radiation illness at Coulport and Faslane. Obviously that is a serious matter and we shall look into it very soon.

I am more than happy to join with my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), as I am sure are all

[Mr. Lee]

hon. Members, in paying a tribute to the backroom boys and girls who support our Navy in all the establishments, so many of which I know are in his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) talked about his visit to HMS Brazen and the lessons learned from the Falklands. We have certainly learned many lessons from the Falklands campaign, particularly on fire resistant clothing, damage control and smoke control. I shall take his suggestion of a questionnaire on board.

I shall write to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on the matter of search and rescue from Lee-on-Solent.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan inquired about our plans for the possible conversion of the Atlantic Causeway into an aviation support ship. The aviation support ship remains a concept which is of interest to us but we are not yet in a position to decide whether it is sufficiently important to warrant a place in the full defence programme. If the project were to proceed, it would be our intention to seek competitive tenders from all interested firms. We would, of course, consider each tender on its merits and award a contract on grounds of best price and delivery terms. I am afraid that I cannot be more positive than that at present.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn referred once again to the S90—the short fat ship—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham. We understand that Admiral Hill-Norton is to present his report on cheaper warships to the Prime Minister's Office some time this month. I cannot comment on the report until I have had the opportunity to study it. All the options were exhaustively examined in 1983, and I have nothing to add to the statement I made to the House on 1 November 1983. The way for the Ministry of Defence to ensure that it gets value for money is to proceed with the design it has. We shall accordingly start with follow-up type 23s this year, as I have intimated.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 79(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

SALMON

That the draft Importation of Live Fish of the Salmon Family Order 1986, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

Question agreed to.

Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Bird

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

10 pm

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement has had a long and productive day and I owe him a great debt of gratitude for being so good as to stay on to reply to the debate.

Perhaps the best I can do to introduce the subject of my unfortunate constituent, Lieutenant-Commander J. A. Bird, is to read an extract from a letter he wrote on 6 November 1984 to the Naval Secretary. He said:

"I was operated on for a cataract on my left eye at Haslar on 11th October, 1983 and left hospital on 17th October. The intention was then that a contact lens would be fitted in the eye. I attended Haslar as an out-patient at approximately fortnightly intervals after the operation and eventually a contact lens was fitted in early February 1984. Although wearing the lens regularly, it made no improvement in my vision and eventually I asked for an examination by a surgeon other than the one who had performed the operation. The operating surgeon had, by this date, seen me as an out-patient on at least half a dozen occasions.

I visited Haslar on 13th March 1984 and was examined by a different eye surgeon who diagnosed a detached retina requiring a prompt operation. During his examination he used the expression 'time is not on our side'. I entered the hospital the next day and was operated on 15th March, leaving on 21st March.

I then made at least two further out-patient visits to Haslar (at my own expense) with no resulting improvement in my vision.

Early in May I transferred from treatment at Haslar to the specialist eye hospital at Weymouth to avoid the expense of constant travelling to and from Haslar."

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State knows, that is in Portsmouth or thereabouts.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): It is in Gosport.

Viscount Cranborne: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon. The letter continued:

"This action was with the knowledge (and, I presume agreement) of the surgeons at Haslar. (I have visited my local eye hospital on several occasions and my local GP also arranged for me to visit Moorfields eye hospital in London. I understand that this latter is the best eye hospital in the country. I have eventually been told by an eye specialist that I cannot expect to recover any sight in my left eye as the retina is totally destroyed.

The current state of my left eye is that I now have no vision in it, it is bloodshot, the lids are partially closed and it has a cast in it."

I have seen Lieutenant-Commander Bird. He is an unfortunate sight. It is unfortunate from his point of view that he has suffered so long. He followed up that letter with another letter on 25 November in which he added that the vision in his right eye has

"now deteriorated to the extent that I am unable to drive a car any more and can read for short periods only."

He underwent a retirement medical examination at HMS Osprey at the end of February 1984. He said—I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will mark this—

"no mention was made of the prospect of such a rapid deterioration of my right eye, nor of its onset after a matter of a few months."

On 31 December, Commander Bird received a reply to his letters advising him that he could not pursue his claim under section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is all too familiar with that. The civil servant wrote:

"This Act effectively debars any claim against the Department in respect of injuries suffered by members of the Armed Forces who are on duty or on property being used for the purposes of the Armed Forces of the Crown."

The letter further suggested that Commander Bird should write to the Department of Health and Social Security asking it to consider paying a pension or gratuity in respect of the injury. My hon. Friend will be aware that that is standard practice.

The plot begins to thicken with a letter that Commander Bird received from Surgeon-Commander Tolley dated 6 February 1985 which finished by again advising him to pursue the DHSS route. The letter also stated:

"Although it could be said that a cataract operation is a routine matter it is, like any operation, not without its attendant risk of complications and, should they occur in ocular surgery, it is usually to the detriment of the expected results. Unfortunately, you"—

that is, Commander Bird—

"Unfortunately suffered one of these complications in that a haemorrhage developed. This was noted on the first post-operative examination of the eye and prevented good vision being obtained, even with a contact lens".

As far as I know, Lieutenant-Commander Bird and Surgeon-Commander Tolley have never met. Surgeon-Commander Tolley was obviously referring to medical reports that he had received from the doctors who attended Commander Bird. Nevertheless, Commander Bird maintains emphatically that he was told nothing of that by the doctors whom he saw. I shall support that assertion by quoting from a letter that my constituent sent to me commenting on letters which my noble Friend Lord Trefgarne sent to me when I first inquired about Commander Bird's case. Commander Bird said:

"I was indeed informed of a state of my left eye on all my visits to Haslar between October 1983 (the date of my first operation) to the middle of April 1984 when my case was transferred to the Weymouth Eye Hospital. Without exception I was told that the eye was healing satisfactorily and that I could expect, with a contact lens, to be able to see 'half way down the chart'."

I wish that I could do as well.

"Surgeon-Commander Tolley can have only hearsay knowledge as he was not present on any of my visits to Haslar and I have never met him."

We are all clearly sorry for Commander Bird. As a result of my noble Friend's replies to my inquiries on my constituent's behalf, I have a suspicion of the type of things that my hon. Friend will say when he replies. First, he will say that the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 has been under fairly constant review for some considerable time, that it is difficult to discriminate between officers serving in the front line and officers who are pursuing other duties out of the front line; and that those difficulties of definition are beyond the Ministry of Defence and the Act must stay where it is. I suspect that he will go further and say that the arrangements with the DHSS, to which Commander Bird referred, and which were mentioned by the Ministry of Defence, were invented to ensure that there was some redress which did not cut across the provisions of section 10.

Far be it from me to impute such thoughts to my hon. Friend, but I suspect that some of us might think that doctors are a pretty tightly run trade union, that if one is going to sue for negligence it is difficult to get one doctor to say that another has been negligent, and that if Commander Bird were sensible he would forget about going through the trouble and expense of suing even if he could, because he would find it difficult to obtain a judgment in his favour. That may well be so. Even if my hon. Friend does not say so, perhaps he would agree with that.

Against these considerations, perhaps we should set others arising from Commander Bird's circumstances and from the general points which arise from this rather tragic case. There is some disagreement—I hope that this is clear from the rather lengthy quotations which I have read from the correspondence—between Commander Bird and the doctors who examined him repeatedly at Haslar during the months following his operation as to whether they thought his recovery was proceeding satisfactorily. However difficult it is to prove negligence, surely it is only fair that people who are subject to this kind of operation on what is, after all, a pretty important sensory item in anyone's physical make-up should at least know that, if they suspect that somebody has been negligent, they have the opportunity to put it to the test. It is very difficult for poor Commander Bird to sit there in pain, doubtful about whether he can see anything at all and finding it difficult to travel and to get a job.

I suggest also that it is not good enough to say that the DHSS benefit, which is the alternative—if, indeed, it is granted—is a sufficient compensation on the grounds that it is a permanent grant and anyway can be updated to take account of inflation. This seems rather absurd when one considers that at present Commander Bird is drawing invalidity benefit amounting to the princely sum of £54·99 a week. If one considers some of the court settlements in such cases, that amount would hardly come to the interest that he could get on any lump sum settlement if he decided to invest it sensibly.

More generally, my hon. Friend may like to consider that it is not conducive to good management, however professional doctors are, to except operatives of any kind from consequences of negligence. It only encourages people to be negligent, however sensible and assiduous they may be. I think that all of us in the House, saving my hon. Friend's presence, realise that Ministers, for all their good intentions, would get away with murder if it were not for the attentions of the Conservative Back Benchers, if not of the Opposition Back Benchers—who, yet again, are conspicuous by their absence.

Commander Bird served for 39 years 10 months in the Royal Navy. He joined, aged 16, as a cadet. He is a loyal Navy man. He refers to taking his case outside the family—something he was reluctant to do. He feels strongly that he owes loyalty to the Navy, and, perhaps, that the Navy owes loyalty to him. I think it is a pretty scurvy repayment of that loyalty if Commander Bird is not able to get some crack of the whip and some public attempt to ascertain whether that difference of opinion between him and the doctors is a matter that it is his right to have considered.

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend has the respect of the House for the manner in which he is putting his constituent's case before the House. I am not in a position to comment on the case at all. However, I should like to say that the Royal Naval hospital, Haslar, is in Gosport, my constituency, and serves civilians and service personnel. Its facilities are excellent and its reputation in the locality is extremely high. I am anxious that that should be known and recorded in the debate.

Viscount Cranborne: I am grateful to my noble Friend. I have no experience of Haslar. It is clearly important that my hon. Friend's experience of this institution in his constituency should be brought to the

[Viscount Cranborne]

defence of its reputation in a debate of this kind. I have no means of knowing what its reputation is and I gratefully accept the good character which my hon. Friend has given the hospital.

Finally, I shall ask my hon. Friend four questions, and I should be extremely grateful if he would address himself to them when he replies. First, is there any chance of an inquiry into the case of Commander Bird, if only to clear Haslar's name, which may have a shadow over it as a result of my raising the matter this evening, let alone to set at rest Commander Bird's mind about whether there was negligence? Secondly, it may be sensible to put in the fast lane a review of the effects of section 10 on serving officers who are away from the front line. After all, civil servants can sue if they have the same trouble as Commander Bird had at Haslar. Thirdly, have there been any other complaints about Haslar? If there have not, it will certainly support the contention of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). Fourthly, in the event of an inquiry reporting that there has been negligence, is it possible that a lump sum of compensation could be paid to the unfortunate Commander Bird, whose loyalty has been severely stretched by his past two years' experience?

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Viscount Cranborne) on his good furtune in securing an Adjournment debate. I also pay tribute to the vigorous way in which he has pursued his constituent's case through correspondence with my Department and, of course, in his deeply sincere and elegant speech tonight. I am also grateful for the praise of the Royal Naval hospital Haslar from my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers).

My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North set out clearly the grievances felt by his constituent, Lieutenant-Commander Bird, over the complications that arose from a cataract operation performed at the Royal Naval hospital Haslar in October 1983. As I understand it, there are three main aspects. First, Lieutenant-Commander Bird feels that as a cataract operation is, in the majority of cases, a routine affair, the unsuccessful outcome of his operation is not entirely due to misfortune. Secondly, he feels that he was not kept properly informed, and thirdly, that a claim for compensation is being hindered by section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. I shall answer each of those points in turn, but, before doing so, it would be helpful to set out briefly the sequence of events, as they have a bearing on the somewhat complicated legal aspects of the case.

Lieutenant-Commander Bird had two operations. The first, which is the one that he feels aggrieved about, was a cataract eye operation performed at Royal Naval hospital Haslar in October 1983. At that time Lieutenant-Commander Bird was still a regular serving officer. In February 1984 he left the service, and at the time of his second operation in March 1984, for a detached retina, which was also performed at Royal Naval hospital Haslar, he was a civilian. I shall come to the details of the medical and legal aspects of the case in a few moments.

The medical aspects of the case are straightforward. The operations were carried out at the Royal Naval hospital Haslar, which is experienced in this type of operation, and carries out approximately 150 a year—most of them by the consultant who operated on Lieutenant-Commander Bird. The treatment and medical management of the case have been closely investigated by Defence Ministers, and have been found to be correct at all stages. The claim of negligence, which is implied by Lieutenant-Commander Bird's phrase

"not entirely due to misfortune",

is without foundation.

It is recognised within the medical profession that every operation has its attendant risk of complications. In operations, such as that undergone by Lieutenant-Commander Bird, it normally prevents restoration of reasonable eyesight without further treatment. Although it has been said that a cataract operation is a routine matter, it is not without hazard. As a national average approximately 2 per cent. of those operated on experience some form of complication. Unfortunately, Lieutenant-Commander Bird suffered one of these hazards in that, subsequent to his first operation, a vitreous haemorrhage — internal bleeding of the eye — developed. It was noticed at the first post-operative examination. The haemorrhage may have been caused by the slightly raised blood pressure combined with the patient's restlessness on the first post-operative night. The contraction of a vitreous haemorrhage and formation of fibrotic bands—clotting of blood — is a well-known precipitating cause of detachment of the retina. The haemorrhage and subsequent inflammation which developed prevented reasonably good eyesight being restored, even with use of a contact lens.

As a result of these indications, Lieutenant-Commander Bird was examined very carefully on a number of occasions but no sign of a detachment was discernible until 13 March 1984. The longer such a condition, once discovered, is left untreated, the poorer the chances of successful corrective treatment. Lieutenant-Commander Bird was therefore operated on a second time almost immediately, on 15 March 1984. Despite careful surgery and post-operative care, the result was less successful than had been hoped. However, the last record at Royal Naval hospital Haslar of Lieutenant-Commander Bird's eyesight does not accord fully with the statement, made in one of the officer's letters to my Department, dated 6 November 1984, that he had no vision at all in the left eye.

With regard to the second issue of being kept informed, it is not normal procedure to speculate on possible untoward complications of an operation in advance of surgery, but any questions asked by a patient would be answered. The consultant would, moreover, routinely explain the operative procedures and likely outcome. Following the operation, Lieutenant-Commander Bird was kept fully informed at all stages — indeed, it was recorded that he had on many occasions produced a written list of questions and the answers to these were discussed with him. The Defence Medical Services believe that keeping the patient informed of his condition and prospects is an important aid to attaining a good recovery. For these reasons, I cannot agree that Lieutenant-Commander Bird was not kept informed.

Lieutenant-Commander Bird's third point touches on the application of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. It may be helpful if I begin by summarising how section 10 works. The section is not a complete ban on legal action by service men but in broad terms provides an absolute defence for the Crown, and for other service men,

against actions alleging negligence brought by service men or their next of kin who are injured or killed in circumstances attributable to their service. Instead, a special gratuity and pension scheme is available to these service men upon leaving the service. There is not, I accept, the prospect of courts possibly awarding a lump sum under the law. But, importantly, the individual does not have the considerable burden of attempting to prove negligence in the courts. For example, if he failed to prove his case, the court would award no compensation and he might be called upon to pay costs. Court procedures can often be lengthy and uncertain, and an award—if made — cannot be adjusted if his condition subsequently deteriorates. Moreover, the income from any damages is taxed as unearned income. By contrast, a service man entitled to an invalidity pension does not have to prove negligence. The pension is based purely on the level of the disability and is payable irrespective of the presence of negligence, and even in cases where the negligence is his own. The pension is tax free, adjusted each year for inflation and can be further increased if there is a deterioration in the service man's condition.

Section 10 was originally enacted because service personnel, by the very nature of their profession, are called upon to perform hazardous tasks which go beyond anything likely to be encountered in normal civil employment. Parliament accepted, and successive governments since 1947 have concurred, that it would not be appropriate for service personnel to be able to bring civil actions for negligence against one another, given the risks associated with the necessarily highly realistic military training that service men undergo. To do so would run counter to the fundamental requirement for mutual trust, confidence and loyalty which is so essential to an effective fighting force.

It has been suggested that this argument should not apply to situations such as treatment in service hospitals, where a civilian in the same circumstances would not be debarred from an action at law. However, attempts over the years to distinguish between activities with a military character and those which are essentially civil in nature have always foundered because of the discrimination it would cause against one category of service man in favour of another. It would, I fear, create more anomalies than it would solve. Nor is it possible for decisions to be taken whether to apply section 10 on a case-by-case basis; if the conditions of section 10 are met, the provisions do not allow any discretion and the law automatically applies.

That said, the Government wish to be sure that it is right for section 10 to continue and have undertaken a comprehensive review of how section 10 works and whether any changes should be made. This review necessarily involves complex legal and disciplinary questions and is not yet complete. I would not wish to pre-empt the conclusions which might be drawn but I can assure the House that we shall take account of all the relevant factors before coming to a final decision.

Turning to the specific aspects of Lieutenant-Commander Bird's case, it has already been explained to him in correspondence that the provisions of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 rule out a compensation claim in common law by him against the Department, alleging medical negligence arising out of his cataract operation at Haslar in October 1983. It has been pointed out to him that alternative provision for compensation for service men injured in the course of duty is available through the conditions of the DHSS war pension scheme. Lieutenant-Commander Bird has been advised several times that his best interest would be served by applying to the DHSS for a war disability pension, and he is aware that he does not have to prove negligence by the Ministry of Defence to succeed in his application. It has only to be established that his disability was attributable to, or aggravated by, service with the Armed Forces. However, inquiries with the DHSS have shown that, apparently, no application from Lieutenant-Commander Bird has been received.

Lieutenant-Commander Bird might be reluctant to apply for a war pension because he considers such action might weaken any case against this Department, alleging medical negligence on the part of Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar. I can only repeat that payment of common law compensation by the Ministry of Defence is ruled out by section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act, and I should say that Lieutenant-Commander Bird is only damaging himself financially by not applying to the DHSS. I must again reiterate that the Ministry of Defence does not, in any case, believe itself to have been negligent and, in a hypothetical absence of section 10, could have been expected to contest any writ for damages. Thus, Lieutenant-Commander Bird might well have received nothing by this route, even if it had been open to him.

In conclusion, the case of Lieutenant-Commander Bird is one of those most unfortunate cases which arise from time to time. Through no fault of any of the medical personnel involved, a complication arose and the desired outcome of the operation was not achieved. I deeply regret this, but I cannot accept any suggestion of negligence on the part of the Ministry of Defence and surgeons at Royal Naval hospital Haslar. As I said, Lieutenant-Commander Bird's interests would be best served by applying to the DHSS for a war disability pension, which does not require him to prove negligence.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Comons

Friday 7 February 1986

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Safety at Sea Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has all-party support. It is designed to bring into legislation a number of safety at sea measures which are at present subject to Member certificates or notices issued by the Department of Transport, but which are not mandatory, and other measures to strengthen the regulations governing safety at sea.

I shall deal with the clauses, leaving clause 3 until the end, as it is one of the most important parts of the legislation. Before going into the detail of the clauses, I think that it would be right for me to explain why, with the co-operation of colleagues on both sides of the House, I decided to introduce the Bill.

The legislation is not intended to apply to yachts or similar craft, or to ferries.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Is my hon. Friend aware of the concern expressed by the Royal Yachting Association and other yachting interests that the legislation might have applied to yachts and other pleasure craft? Will my hon. Friend confirm that he will move amendments in Committee that will make that point clear?

Mr. McQuarrie: When the Bill was drafted, it was not intended that its provisions would affect yachts or similar craft, or that it would apply to ferries. This morning I received a number of suggested amendments from the parliamentary draftsman to the Royal Yachting Association which will clarify the position for the association. I am perfectly happy to give my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) the assurance that he seeks. I hope that that makes the position clear to all yachting organisations. The Bill is not intended to affect yachting associations.

Those of us from fishing constituencies often visit the relatives of fishermen who have gone down to the sea and have not returned. On many occasions we are asked to introduce safety at sea measures. Requests have been made for legislation, rather than recommendations, by the Department of Transport. The sad incidents on the Ocean Harvest in October, the Bon Ami in December and the Mhairi L last February led me to decide to introduce the Bill.

This morning I received a letter from Mrs. Helen Maxwell, who is in hospital in Dumfries and whose son was on the Mhairi L. She expresses the great hope that the Bill will help to save fishermen. She says:

"We will grieve for our lost sons for the rest of our days . . . We know you are fighting for all the fishermen in Scotland. So my thoughts and prayers will be with you."

I should like to pay tribute to Mr. Andrew Thomson, Mr. Terry Hayward and other management and staff at Dunlop-Beaufort in Birkenhead for their great help and co-operation not only in drafting parts of the Bill but in giving me an insight into the vast detail investigated by that firm in connection with technical research and production of safety at sea equipment. I should like to thank also Mr. Barnes of Berndept Electronics, Electronics Marine, and others who have been such a help to me with respect to the distress beacon. Those firms, especially Dunlop-Beaufort, were kind enough to assist me in the safety at sea exhibition which was held yesterday in the Palace of Westminster. I am grateful to all my colleagues who saw the exhibition. It was a first-class presentation and gave us many opportunities to see the problems with which the Bill deals.

I should also like to thank Mr. Harry Barrett, the managing director, and Mr. Ian Strutt and the staff of *Fishing News* for the tremendous amount of research that they carried out. They provided me with information about accidents and fatalities involving fishing vessels at sea. Other people, too numerous to mention, have my thanks for the help, encouragement and co-operation they gave me in presenting the Bill.

Clause 1 relates to the fitting of a float-free emergency radio beacon, which will increase safety at sea as it will automatically transmit on aircraft frequencies 121·5 MHz and 243 MHz prepared for sarsat-satellite homing. The emergency beacon will float free and activate automatically should the vessel sink. There is seldom time to broadcast a mayday message for long enough to provide a reliable radio fix for search and rescue agencies if the vessel sinks. Even if there is time, such a radio fix will indicate only the point where the vessel was lost.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Has my hon. Friend had any discussions with Her Majesty's Coastguard on that part of the Bill and the way in which those signals might communicate with its co-ordination facilities and search and rescue functions?

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful for that comment. I have not so far discussed the matter with HM Coastguard. It is my intention, and I am sure that of my hon. Friends who support the Bill, that if the Bill receives its Second Reading we shall consult widely with all organisations involved, to ensure that when the Bill returns to the House on Third Reading we shall have had the fullest discussions so that all the points that must be made about distress beacon signals are fully covered. That will ensure that fishermen have additional facilities, if they can be operated by HM Coastguard.

By fitting a hydrostatic release unit to the radio beacon, the system is activated by water pressure as soon as the vessel sinks. That action releases the lashings which hold the beacon canister securely in the deck-mounted cradle. Once the lashings are loosened, the two halves of the spring-loaded canister break open, allowing the self-buoyant beacon to float free from the sinking vessel. At

[Mr. McQuarrie]

the same time, the operation activates the beacon transmitter, which then broadcasts on the civil and military air distress frequencies.

If vessels are fitted with those emergency position indicating radio beacons—commonly called EPIRB—it means that they will aid the maritime and aircraft rescue services in pinpointing the location of the sinking vessel. That is an important factor, because on many occasions when the vessel goes down the problem is to pinpoint its position. Rescue services then have to search over hundreds of square miles to try to find the vessel. That will be an important factor once the beacon has been established as a type that can be used for identification.

Signals can be identified at distances up to 100 miles. Aircraft will not be constrained by the prevailing conditions or the size of the vessel in distress. Distress signals from the beacon can be transmitted for at least 72 hours. That is another important factor. If the beacon can continue to transmit once the vessel goes down, it means that civil and military aircraft can get to the scene and alert fishing and other vessels in the disaster area. Beacons are a must for fishing vessels. They can save lives at sea. For that, if no other reason, they should be fitted.

As long ago as 1981 the Department of Trade reported a change of policy with regard to the fitting of EPIRBs. Until then, the Department had felt that their use gave fishermen too much confidence. The Department announced that the use of those distress beacons would greatly improve the chances of locating persons when a vessel had gone down. However, the Department did not bring in the necessary legislation; it merely recommended their use on fishing vessels. The Bill seeks to compel the use of approved distress beacons to save more lives. I hope that the Department of Transport, which is now responsible for shipping, will ensure that that requirement is enforced if the Bill becomes law.

Clause 2 will require fishing vessels of between 30 ft and 300 ft to have on board sufficient life jackets for the crew and any passengers. It will also require that life rafts should have hydrostatic release units fitted, so that the life raft will inflate automatically and float free if the vessel sinks. Most vessels carry life rafts, but not all have hydrostatic units fitted. If lives are to be saved, it is vital that the fitting of those units should become compulsory.

There may well be no opportunity free a life raft if it has been stored on the deck or on top of the wheelhouse. If the hydrostatic unit is used, it is guaranteed that the life raft will come to the surface. A life raft with a unit attached has a painter made fast to the weak link system of the hydrostatic unit. The location of the HRU is such that it is readily accessible and is located on the seaward side of the vessel. When submerged to a depth of 1·5 m to 3·7 m, the hydrostatic unit operates automatically. Freed of its lashings, the container rises to the surface, paying out the inflation painter line as it goes, but retaining it to the HRU by means of the weak link. It is the combination of the rising container and the sinking vessel which provides the painter tension which activates the gas cyclinder and starts inflation once the free painter line is paid out. As the vessel sinks, the weak line will break, releasing the life raft from the vessel. The weak link breaking strength is such that the raft is not dragged under by the sinking vessel, thus ensuring that survivors have another chance of being saved at sea. Without that essential piece of equipment, the chances of survival at sea are slim. In that connection, I should like to refer to the loss of the MFV Mhairi I in the eastern section of the Irish sea on 20 February 1985. The Department of Transport report on that sinking was published in December 1985.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, technically, the report was not published, although a number of us pressed that it should be published officially? It was presented to the Secretary of State for Transport. Some of us are anxious that it should be published and that its recommendations should be widely known.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I was about to say that he might wish to refer to that tragedy. I agree that the report was not published, but it should be published, because the public are entitled to see such reports. We are here today to try to obtain more safety at sea. If we can encourage people and in particular fishing organisations, to read such reports, they will know what the Department proposes to do about such matters.

Paragraph 6.7 of that report stated:

"Lives might have been saved had the ship's life rafts been fitted with hydrostatic release units so that they floated free when the ship sank. Merchant shipping notice M1173 recommends that such units are fitted in fishing vessels, and the tragedy of Mhairi L underlines this advice."

The Department of Transport report merely restates that the fitting of such units is a recommendation and not mandatory. We seek to introduce legislation which will make the requirement mandatory.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): As my hon. Friend goes through the various devices, will he tell us approximately what percentage of vessels carry them, without legislation, and what percentage are foolhardy enough not to do so?

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for asking that question. Unfortunately, I cannot give him those figures. I can only confirm that very many vessels do not have those devices. There is an urgent need for them to be fitted. We should not simply recommend that, but should make it mandatory. That is what I am seeking in my Bill.

Paragraph 5.2 of the report stated that a trawl had fouled a cable, and as it was likely that all hands were on deck—I want to reinforce the fact that all were on deck—in an effort to clear the cable, they would have been thrown into the water. As the vessel's life rafts were not fitted with hydrostatic units, and so did not inflate and float free, there is no doubt that the crew could not have survived for long. That terrible tragedy, which resulted in the loss of five fishermen's lives, illustrates how vital it is that the Department of Transport recommendation should now become obligatory.

If the cost of the unit were prohibitive, I could understand resistance from the fishing industry. However, a new hydrostatic unit, such as that approved by the Department of Transport, costs about £80. The unit also attracts a 25 per cent. grant from the Sea Fish Industry Authority and is tax deductible as a business expense. Is that too much to pay for saving the life of a fisherman? Is it too much to pay to avoid the tragedy of the widows and children left on shore? For too long we have relied on "M" notices to implement safety at sea measures that will save

lives. Now is the time to introduce legislation that will allow fishermen to return from their dangerous work to the safety and comfort of their homes and families.

As I said earlier, I shall not deal with clause 3 now, because of its importance to the Bill. I shall deal with it later.

Clause 4 deals with wheelhouse visibility. I wish to make it quite clear that the clause is intended to apply to new vessels or to vessels undergoing major overhaul. Existing vessels will be exempted form the clause, because I am aware of the problems that its application could cause, especially to the inshore fishing fleet. I have been persuaded to exempt fishing vessels because I was made aware that many of those vessel owners had already taken steps to ensure that safety at sea measures would be incorporated in any modernisation.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has clarified the position and confirmed that the clause will apply only to new constructions. Can he enlighten me on the meaning of subsection (3), which states:

"No such vessel shall be constructed nor repaired to return to sea".

Does that not cover existing vessels? There would be strong opposition to that from fishermen because of the expense of covering welldecks on fishing boats if existing vessels were obliged to fall into line with the provisions of the clause.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point. An amendment will be introduced in Committee to provide for existing vessels to be excluded from the clause. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman understands that, because of the time factor and the method of drafting of the Bill—it must be done by hon. Members, not by the parliamentary draftsman—it was impossible to have full consultation. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the matter will be dealt with.

The clause will require new and modernised vessels to be constructed in such a manner that the view from the conning position in the wheelhouse is not obscured by the superstructure. It is important for the safety of the crew that all new vessels or major modernisations should be so designed and capable of operation that the person in control of navigation has his view of the horizon obstructed as little as possible.

The boat builders must endeavour to foresee every operational condition for which the vessel is designed, with particular regard to the trim. For major modernisation, there is a requirement for the boat builders to ensure that any modification does not impair the visibility from the wheelhouse. It might be that, to achieve that end, the wheelhouse would have to be raised from the deck to maintain at least the previous standard.

The advent of new electronic equipment fitted for navigation and fish detection within small wheelhouses has curtailed forward visibility, which has caused collisions, with disastrous results. The clause is yet another measure to ensure safety at sea. It should be welcomed by the fishing industry.

Clause 5 deals with load lines. Fishing vessels are exempt from the legislation on load lines laid down in the Merchant Shipping (Load Lines) Act 1967. The reason is that fishing vessels are not loaded in the peaceful atmosphere of a port, when it can readily be seen when cargo is overloaded. When vessels are loaded at sea, it is difficult to observe whether they are depressed below the load line.

There is a provision that each vessel should have a stability book giving details of such information as maximum weight of cargo in various conditions. There is also legislation on the safety of fishing vessels, in particular the Fishing Vessels (Safety Provisions) Act 1970. The trouble is that load lines are not compulsory for fishing vessels, and if we want safety at sea, we must turn our minds to that aspect.

In a written answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—I am pleased that he is in his place this morning—on 15 February 1979 Mr. Clinton Davis, the then Under-Secretary of State for Trade, said that the working group on the occupational safety of fishermen had recommended the marking of safe working loads on fishing vessels, usually called the Plimsoll line. He said that work would be put in hand immediately in consultation with all interests concerned. That was 1979, but no legislation has been introduced.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) also raised the matter of the Plimsoll line with that same Minister during the Committee stage of the Merchant Shipping Bill in 1979. He was assured that the question of load lines on fishing vessels carrying our bulk shipping was being actively considered. If we are to have safety at sea, that active consideration should have been concluded long before now.

Mr. Fairbairn: I can understand the operation of a load line in port, where the water is flat and the lines in the water can be seen by someone standing on the shore. However, I cannot understand the operation of a load line at sea, when the sea may be rough, and someone would have to get off the boat and stand on some other object to see whether the vessel had reached the load line.

Mr. McQuarrie: We must recognise that modern vessels, with a massive amount of new machinery, must have some sort of a Plimsoll line to ensure the correct loading of the vessel. They must be able to measure capacity and the extent to which the loaded vessel will drop in the water.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Cargo vessels similarly do not remain in port all their lives—they go to sea and sail in rough waters. However, the Plimsoll line is applicable to them so it can equally be applied to fishing vessels.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful the hon. Gentleman for making the very point that I wished to make.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Surely the point is that if a vessel is loaded in a harbour it is possible to see in the calm water the effect of loading on the Plimsoll line, whereas it is more difficult to see the effect of loading when it takes place at sea. I think that that is a point that my hon. Friend will want us to discuss further in Committee.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that he will take account of what the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Plimsoll line is a means of persuading the captain to conform to loading regulations. The Minister is

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

right, but it is practical to measure the weight of cargo taken on board a fishing vessel even in seas that are less than calm.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If a fishing vessel has a Plimsoll line, the inspectors will be able to see whether a fishing vessel is overloaded as it comes into port. Not long ago, there was a dreadful incident in the south-west in which a bucking fishing vessel went over because the catch shifted. How many more vessels must topple over, and how many more crews must drown, before we have legislation requiring load lines? Too many lives have been lost because of overloading. Clause 5 must be considered seriously, because history has proved the need for it. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister has said that we will consider the matter in Committee. As I have said, the hon. Members for Great Grimsby and for East Lothian raised the issue in 1979, but still nothing has been done.

Clause 6 covers smaller fishing vessels. It would ensure safety at sea for the crew. Clause *6(a)* and *(b)* are at present implemented by most vessels because they are part of an M notice issued by the Department of Transport. Many of the vessels already carry a lifeboat or life raft, which is highly commendable, but they should be required to be fitted with a hydrostatic unit. The clause would make compulsory the wearing of lifejackets when working on deck and the provision of 10 per cent. extra lifejackets in case of loss or damage.

The size of fishing vessel to which the clause refers has suffered more than any other in terms of loss of life. The additional requirement is just another chance to ensure that a father returns to his wife and children, or that a son returns to his mother and father. The cost of a lifejacket is negligible compared with the cost of a fisherman's life. I hope that the clause will be welcomed by everyone in the fishing industry.

Clause 7 deals with debris at sea. Ever since the discovery of North sea oil, fishermen have experienced serious problems because of debris dumped at sea. I am aware of a fund called United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, which is supposed to deal with compensation claims by fishermen when a vessel's gear or catch are damaged by debris. Fishermen's problems were illustrated by a recent incident concerning the MV Faithful PD67. For those who do not know, PD67 means that the vessel comes from Peterhead, which is the largest fishing port in Europe and in my constituency.

The vessel is owned by my constituent, Mr. Walter Milne. He encountered oil-related debris at sea. It was a hawser which had been severed at both ends by cutting or burning. It took 32 hours to tow the obstacle back to Peterhead, and when the crane lifted it out of the water, its identity was established. My constituent was quite right when he told me about the sheer stupidity of those who had dumped the debris, in view of the danger to the vessel, the danger to his crew and the loss of his catch and of his gear. For 23 years Mr. Milne has watched with concern the dangers of dumping debris at sea. His view is shared by the whole fishing industry. He rightly says that fishermen will still be fishing in the North sea long after the oil men have gone; that is if many of them survive the dangers of dumped debris.

What are the chances of compensation for fishermen? The cost to Mr. Milne was £30,000. Loss of gear amounted to £8,000, crane hire to remove the debris was £650, divers' costs to inspect the damage were £475, additional fuel used to tow the debris back to Peterhead was £1,400 and the value of fish lost was £20,000 as the Faithful was pair trawling with the MV Sunlight, and both vessels lost their catch.

Mr. Milne applied for compensation. Did he get full compensation? No. He was offered, as he put it, "pennies rather than pounds". That is a scandal which the fishing industry has had to bear for far too long. I accept that proving who dumped the debris will not be easy, but if there was legislation under which to prosecute and fine culprits, and provision for full compensation for the owner of the vessel, that would be a major step forward and could prove to be a deterrent which rids fishermen of this great problem.

Mr. Henderson: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said about getting rid of this hazard, and the clause is helpful, as it refers to debris from whatever source. Will he confirm, however, so that there is no misunderstanding in the oil industry, that there is already legislation which makes it illegal for oil industry people to leave debris after a wellhead has been closed off? There is firm legislation to ensure that the oil industry does not create such hazards for fishermen, so the clause is aimed at other parts of industry.

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am not sure whether the point that he is trying to drive home is entirely covered by present legislation. I am led to understand that if an oil company wants to dispose of a rig which is no longer used for drilling, and the well has been closed off, it seeks the authority of the Department to lower the rig to the sea bed. That is not necessarily a satisfactory solution when dealing with debris. What my hon. Friend said must be taken on board by the Department, because, when the rigs are finished and the oil has dried up, there will be a massive amount of debris from skelton rig and other pieces on dismantling, which cannot be retrieved no matter how much care is taken. We should be careful, therefore, as debris could become an even bigger problem. As we have said many times, fishermen will be there long after the oil has gone. It is our responsibility, as legislators, to protect and safeguard the future of the fishing industry.

There is a drafting error in clause 8. It should provide:

"All persons of age 50 or less who sail in fishing vessels for the first time shall undertake".

The words "for the first time" have been omitted.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why he has limited the clause to those aged 50 or less, and has not included all entrants?

Mr. McQuarrie: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I was advised that few people want to go into the industry for the first time when they are aged over 50. If the hon. Gentleman can provide examples and thinks that the limit should be raised, I should be happy to consider the matter in Committe.

Some years ago the Sea Fisheries Training Council reported that more than half of all United Kingdom fishermen had never had any training in survival, fire fighting or first aid, and that many school leavers went to sea without any instruction. The response to that was

immediate, as the industry saw the need for safety at sea. During a period of two years, 3,200 fishermen were provided with a one-day course in survival at sea and fire fighting. The courses were arranged by a network of training centres which were set up near the main fishing ports. I have visited the centre in my constituency, which is run by Mr. William Milne, a training officer at Peterhead, where the north-east of Scotland training centre is located. The courses are excellent and give fishermen the necessary safety at sea knowledge to cater for any eventuality. The trouble is that the courses are not compulsory.

While I accept that the number of fishermen who have had no training in safety at sea is not now 50 per cent. of those who go to sea, it remains too high. One bad cog in the wheel can prevent any engine from running smoothly, and one fisherman on a vessel who is untrained in survival at sea can be a great danger to his fellow crewmen. The courses are neither difficult nor time consuming. If we are to ensure that all who sail in fishing vessels have had training in safety at sea, legislation must ensure that the training schools continue to exist and that the work carried out by dedicated officers is put to use.

That is an important point, because at present the courses are financed by the Manpower Services Commission and the Sea Fish Industry Authority. I understand that the MSC will be phased out in 1986, so some means will be required to finance the courses thereafter. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take that matter on board and say how the courses will be financed when the MSC goes out of existence.

Clauses 9 to 16 cover miscellaneous matters which are self-explanatory. Some clauses will need to be amended in Committee, particularly clause 12, under which the owner or skipper of a vessel should not necessarily be liable for the action of others. I shall be pleased to make such amendments, as in a Bill of this nature the drafting is bound to require revision. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North for his helpful suggestions about that clause and others. I am grateful to him for helping me consider matters before, rather than after, today's debate.

I return to clause 3, which deals with the compulsory wearing of life jackets on deck. I am well aware that when the clause was announced fishermen resisted it. That was mainly because they were unaware that the life jackets were not the traditional type which handicap men working on deck but are a new model which is neither cumbersome nor a problem to work in. It is a harness manufactured by Dunlop-Beaufort and is extremely useful. Unfortunately, time did not permit consultation with the fishing industry, which I should have liked, but fishermen will have ample time and opportunity to test this type of life jacket.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): I apologise for arriving late, but I am afraid that Brisih Rail delivered me late, so I missed most of my hon. Friend's speech. Clause 15(3) states:

"For the purposes of section 7 'vessel' includes",

and then gives the definition. Why is that definition limited to clause 7, and what would the difinition of "vessel" be in clauses 3 and 1?

Mr. McQuarrie: I shall consider that point in Committee and have it clarified if necessary. If my hon. Friend would like to comment further, he should drop me a line before the Committee stage, and I shall certainly consider his points.

The new design has been geared to the needs of fishermen. Too many lives have been lost at sea because fishermen could not get at their life jackets when disaster struck. Hon. Members who are involved in the fishing industry know that most fishermen have a life jacket on board, but under their pillows. I make no criticism of that. Although they have one, they cannot get at it when they need it. Many fishermen have been lost overboard because they were not wearing a life jacket. In many cases when a man falls overboard he strikes his head, is knocked unconscious and cannot reach a life line. When a man falls overboard, unconscious or otherwise, this new life jacket will automatically inflate. It inflates only when it hits the sea and the automatic release triggers the action. It can also turn a man over to be face up. Therefore, he will not drown, even if he falls in unconscious.

Fishermen must seriously consider wearing life jackets. I am aware that it is not the custom to wear life jackets on deck, but, as with seat belts in a car, it requires only one person to be saved when wearing a life jacket to prove the need for them. It will be difficult to persuade fishermen to use them constantly, and it has been said that implementing the legislation will not be easy. I accept that. It will be said that the life jackets are too expensive, but what is the cost of a fisherman's life? How many more widows and fatherless children must there be before the message gets home that fishermen who ply their trade in hazardous conditions are loved and wanted at home? If they are drowned at sea, they leave only sad memories and dashed hopes.

It has been my sad experience to visit the sorrowing relatives of the men on Ocean Harvest, from Macduff, which went down in October 1985, and those on the Bon Ami, from Whitehills, which went down on 20 December 1985, both with the loss of all hands. Since 1977, 89 fishermen from my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mr. Pollock) have been drowned at sea. I wonder how many of those lives would have been saved if they had been wearing life jackets with an automatic release which would have kept them afloat until the rescue services arrived. Between 1961 and 1980 there were 909 recorded deaths at sea involving fishermen. This ever-escalating figure is too high to be acceptable. I cannot repeat often enough that the number of widows and fatherless children who are left to mourn a husband and father drowned at sea is far too great. It is our responsibility, as legislators and caring people, to create greater safety at sea, through means acceptable to fishermen.

I would not for a minute suggest that fishermen do not apply safety at sea measures when they are out in the cold, dark, waters, but they, like all of us, are only human. As the motorist has been protected by the use of safety belts, which now have a proven record of accident prevention, the time has come to move forward and introduce legislation to save lives at sea. Such legislation will be difficult to enforce, but so was seat belt legislation. Time, experience and habit will bring the wearing of life jackets into everyday use at sea.

The Bill is not the end of the line of legislation for safety at sea. The safety group will continue to make new recommendations in its report to the Secretary of State for Transport, who will in turn lay them before Parliament in

[Mr. McQuarrie]

accordance with clause 9. The Secretary of State has power under the Bill to make amendments in the interests of greater safety at sea.

I am well aware of the great responsibility that the presentation of the Bill to Parliament brings to me and my supporters. I am distressed that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation should say that

"quite explicitly they cannot support the Bill in its present form."

I have always had the highest regard for this organisation, and I am disturbed that it has made such a comment when the purpose of the Bill is to save the lives of fishermen.

I am glad to say that yesterday I met Willie Hay, the President, Sandy Baird and Gilbert Buchan and took note of their concern about some of the Bill's clauses. I expressed my hope that they would accept the Bill, in the knowledge that it was for their benefit and that of their fishermen. I accepted that they would want to make constructive observations and have a full and technical dialogue with me and my colleagues who will steer the Bill through Committee, and promised to consult them fully, just as I am sure my hon. Friends will consult the fishermen in their constituencies. I told them that I would be pleased to discuss all aspects of the Bill with the SSF and any others. However, I must make it clear that I and my colleagues have had the courage of our convictions in bringing these measures forward and that we intend to complete the legislation, after the fullest consultation with all concerned in the fishing industry during the Committee stage.

If the Bill saves more fishermen from drowning, if it means fewer widows, sorrowing parents and fatherless children, and less need for tears or mourning, it will achieve that which many of my constituents have asked me to do. I promised that I would introduce a Safety at Sea Bill if ever I had the opportunity to do so. I was given that chance, and I commend the Bill to the House, in the hope that it will have a safe passage to the statute book at an early date.

10.21 am

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on his good fortune in drawing a place in the ballot for private Members' Bills and even more on the good purpose for which he is using that opportunity.

It has been said that the legislation proposed in the Bill will not eliminate the tragedies that take place at sea, and one accepts that. Far more sophisticated vessels than fishing boats, such as liners with the most up-to-date life-saving equipment, can get into trouble. However well ships are covered by such safety devices, inevitably the loss of life can be fairly high.

In recent years there has been a horrendous tale of loss of life at sea in the fishing industry — a far more dangerous industry in terms of fatalities than even the coal industry. It has been aggravated in recent years by small vessels being obliged to go into more dangerous waters. We had the tragic loss on 20 December of the crew of the Bon Ami.

Mr. Willie Hay, the president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, has said that Scottish fishermen are not irresponsible and that they consider the safety of the crew. I cannot see that the Bill implies anything to the contrary. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said, many of us wore safety belts in cars before legislation made it compulsory. There is little argument about the improvement that the compulsory wearing of seat belts has made in reducing serious accidents and death on the road.

In the *Fishing News* of 7 February Mr. George Sutherland, chairman of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, said:

"The industry should be left alone to settle its own affairs."

With respect to Mr. Sutherland, that is what the House cannot agree to, although we accept that the fullest consultation with fishermen should be maintained during the passage of the Bill. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has said that he will do that.

The clause about distress beacons cannot be argued against. It is extremely important that the site of an accident at sea should be pinpointed as early as possible. Sometimes, crew members are in the water and it is vital, especially in the kind of weather that we are having, that they should be got out of the water as quickly as possible. The period of survival in low temperatures is extremely short. The distress beacon is an excellent suggestion.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has said that life jackets are not at the moment worn at sea, and that is understandable, for a good reason. They are extremely bulky, and men gutting fish on deck and doing other work on the vessel would be hampered greatly. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to see the life jacket proposed in the legislation. I think that men wearing such a life jacket could work, even on a fishing boat in rough weather, without any undue obstruction to their movements. It is hardly any more obtrusive than the braces that we wear to keep up our trousers. It can be inflated by the action of seawater, and, when inflated, has a tremendous bouyancy that would maintain a fisherman, even in his heavy clothing, for a considerable length of time.

Mr. Henderson: I think that the life jacket is a wee bit heavier than the galluses that I am wearing. However, the kind of braces that a fisherman wears to hold up his heavy waterproof trousers are similar to the size and shape of the life jacket to which the right hon. Gentleman is referring.

Mr. Stewart: I accept that point. I was not speaking entirely to the last millimetre when I spoke about braces. The life jacket is a bit bulkier than that. However, compared with previous life jackets, it is virtually non-existent. It is a great improvement. I feel that, with due respect to fishermen, once they have started wearing them, they will not be aware of them most of the time.

Some fishermen have said that they will stow the new life jackets away, and they will never be used. That attitude may be met in all types of industry. In the woollen trade there is a process for dirty wool that is called "teasing" and the air is full of dust all the time. By law, woollen mills are obliged to provide face masks for men working in teasing houses. I recall going to one of those places where the men were not wearing their masks because, they said, it was easier to work without them. However, the masks had been provided to the men for their safety, just as the Bill suggests that life jackets be provided for the safety of fishermen.

Fishermen are independent, but I hope and am confident, that, in time, they will accept the necessity for wearing these life jackets at all times, especially because of the excellent feature that men who are washed overboard unconscious are turned over face up in the water. That is a great thing in itself.

The Bill also deals with load lines. When there have been heavy shoals of mackerel, I have seen vessels coming into Stornoway harbour—no doubt this happens in other harbours as well—loaded so dangerously low down that the hawser holes were almost at sea level. Fortunately, the weather was good, but if a sudden gale had come up, the ship would have been swamped. It is a good idea to ensure that the safety level is not exceeded.

I am not so sure about the point about debris at sea. There will be many difficulties. Fishermen losing a net or a trawl will have to pinpoint it and go out and collect it at a later date, at considerable cost. I hope that in Committee that part of the Bill will be carefully examined. I have no doubt that in the meantime the fishermen will make known their views on that.

Mr. McQuarrie: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the call for some form of legislation to deal with debris at sea has come primarily from fishermen because of the great problems that they have experienced? I illustrated during my speech the long length of cable that Mr. Milne's fishing vessel had to drag back to port. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is essential that there should be legislation to compensate fishermen for that kind of incident?

Mr. Stewart: That is a fair point. I am aware that fishermen have been annoyed about debris, particularly since the installation of oil rigs in the North sea. However, my point is that fishermen will be caught by the clause and made responsible for creating debris. They might not be very happy about that.

Apart from the life-saving devices and other measures that are proposed in the Bill, I hope that comprehensive training courses will continue. I am glad that the Bill contains a training clause. The course should include sea survival, fire fighting, first aid and aspects of radio communication connected with sea rescue. It was a mistake to abandon the Sea Fisheries Training Council, but 90 per cent. of the men in the Western Isles fishing fleet are now trained in survival methods. I hope that survival disciplines will eventually be incorporated in the Bill.

I welcome the Bill. It is essential, and the time for it is now. I wish the Bill a safe and speedy passage. The numbers of tragedies to which we have grown accustomed in recent years may be decreased by implementation of the provisions in the Bill.

10.31 am

Sir Walter Clegg (Wyre): It is, as ever, a pleasure to follow in debate the right hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Stewart). I, too, welcome the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie). It is quite an achievement. Hon. Members receive very little practical help with the drafting of Bills. This Bill is highly technical, and my hon. Friend has had little time in which to prepare it. When we refer, therefore, to amending it in Committee, we are not doing my hon. Friend an injustice. He has made a Second Reading speech that deals with the general principles of the Bill which we can use to build upon in Committee.

Fishermen have underestimated the time that my hon. Friend has had to hold detailed consultations with them. I am glad that some of the fishermen were able to attend yesterday's exhibition. I hope that before the Bill becomes law the exhibition can be taken around the fishing ports so that other fishermen may see it.

Mr. McQuarrie: I can assure my hon. Friend that I have been advised that Dunlop-Beaufort has advised me that it will be willing to take the exhibition around all the fishing ports in the country to demonstrate its hydrostatic unit and life-saving jacket.

Sir Walter Clegg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that the exhibition will come to Fleetwood, because the manufacturers of this equipment are in the north-west of England. All hon. Members want safety at sea to be improved, but we have to remember the fears of fishermen about the cost of this new equipment. Times are so hard for the inshore fishing fleet at Fleetwood that undue pressure on costs would make life very difficult for them. However, the cost of this new equipment could be alleviated by a grant. My hon. Friend said that a 25 per cent. grant will be made available for purchases from the Sea Fish Industry Authority. I hope that the grant will be increased to more than 25 per cent.

Mr. McQuarrie: My hon. Friend is suggesting that the grant of 25 per cent. ought to be increased. A vast amount of money is spent upon air and sea rescue services when there is a disaster at sea. It may be possible for the cost of air and sea rescue services to be diverted to the provision of distress beacons and other safety at sea measures. Ultimately this could lead to the equipment being provided free to fishermen.

Sir Walter Clegg: I very much hope that that will happen. However, the cost of this equipment has to be taken into account.

I am also concerned about the date when the Bill will take effect. It is to take effect within six months of the Bill becoming an Act. We shall have to look at that point in Committee. We must ensure that sufficient equipment is available by the time that the Act takes effect. I was assured yesterday at the exhibition that there would be few problems about that, but we must ensure that we do not introduce regulations before the fishermen can comply with them because the equipment is not available.

Clause 3 deals with the wearing of approved life jackets. The new style of life jacket was graphically described by the right hon. Member for the Western Isles and by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan. It is a new departure. These life jackets will surprise fishermen who see them for the first time. They appear to be so easy to use without being a major encumbrance while performing fishing operations.

I support my hon. Friend's Bill. He has done a very good job, but I am sure that he will agree with me that during the Committee stage we can hone it and polish it until it is much better than it is now.

10.37 am

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on his good fortune in the ballot. I regard it as a rare privilege to be one of the sponsors of his admirable Bill. I compliment him upon his moral courage and intellectual integrity during his searching re-examination of his approach to this deeply

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disturbing issue. He will not forget the incident when he gently chided me on 5 June 1984, when we were debating the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Bill. He said:

"I believe that there are sufficient safety powers in respect of the vessels that go the sea."—[*Official Report*, 5 June 1984; Vol. c. 245.]

I am gently chiding him now, although I admire his courage in coming back to the House with his Bill. I know how difficult fishermen can be to deal with. I speak with knowledge because I come from a family of fishermen. My mother was a fisher girl, and fisher girls are even more difficult to deal with.

I sincerely hope that Mr. Bob Allan and his colleagues in the Scottish Fishermen's Federation will re-examine their attitudes to this laudable and honourable Bill. In *The Scotsman* of 9 February 1984, a long article on fishing vessel safety, which is an important subject for Scotland, states:

"At the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, Bob Allan, the chief executive, confessed to a degree of surprise at the figures"—

the figures of deaths and vessel losses. The article continued by quoting Mr. Allan:

"'Over the years we have been saddened and perplexed on the occasions when vessels are lost without apparent explanation.' In the wake of Holland-Martin"—

the committee of inquiry into trawler safety set up by Lord Wilson in 1969—

"everyone became very safety conscious and there had been a tremendous number of strides forward, with the Scottish fleet being more modern that the rest of the United Kingdom. 'Frankly, I don't think there is any more we can do, he said."

I have much respect for Bob Allan, but I regret to say that much more can be done. That is why I am privileged to be a sponsor of the Bill.

On Wednesday, I asked the Secretary of State for Transport to give me some idea of the number of United Kingdom registered fishing vessels that had been lost since 1975. The figure is 424. That is an appalling loss of vessels and of men.

My first personal experience of tragedy at sea was when my uncle Midge died when the Hull trawler Boston Seafire encountered severe weather on its run down to Hull from the Norwegian fishing grounds. I remember as a young man several of my school friends losing their fathers when the Hull trawlers Lorella and Roderigo foundered off north-west Iceland in 1955. There have been many other losses. I remember also, because I had many friends on board the vessels, the three Hull trawlers that went down in 1968. That prompted the setting up of that useful and fine committee on trawler safety. One aspect of those tragedies that will stay with me always, which is why I welcome the Bill, is that only one man survived when those three trawlers foundered within days of each other. The mate of the Ross Cleveland, Harry Eddom, survived because he was wearing an immersion suit, albeit of a primitive kind.

I hope to be here for the winding-up speech of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, but I have to go to Carlisle to take part in a televised debate on child abuse.

All the clauses are important, but clause 3, relating to the wearing of lifejackets, is an especially fine clause. I compliment the hon. Gentleman for helping to organise the display and demonstration yesterday. I put on one of the belts, and an official of the company inflated it. I was impressed by its lightness and the fact that it appeared, in the safe confines of the House of Commons Dining Room, not to impede or restrict movement of the trunk, arms and hands.

However, clause 3 should go further. Every vessel should carry immersion suits for each member of the crew. I believe that they cost about £300 each. I take on board what was said by the hon. Gentleman earlier, but every vessel should carry immersion suits. France, Norway, Denmark and the Federal Republic of Germany have regulations to ensure that immersion suits are carried on merchant and fishing vessels. I may be wrong, but I am fairly certain that that is the case. The clause should be amended to include the carriage of immersion suits. They will not always save lives, but, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said, if they save only a handful of lives, the costs—it is possible to obtain grants and tax relief on their purchase; but perhaps the Minister will correct if I am wrong—of acquiring, carrying and stowing the suits in a sensible place—not in the bunkers or tucked away in a locker under a bunk—will be worth while. As I said, the only man to survive in those dreadful tragedies off north-west Iceland was wearing an immersion suit. He clambered on to a life raft with three other members of the crew. Unfortunately, they were wearing only semmit and drawers. They all died, with the exception of Harry Eddom who was wearing an immersion suit.

Fishermen will not like me for saying that they should be compelled to wear safety helmets when working on the decks of their trawlers. They work in a harsh environment and the sea is never like Dylan Thomas's "fishingboat-bobbing sea," or some the advertisements that persuade us to buy those horrible fish fingers. We should always buy fresh fish. The sea is almost always rough. On the last voyage that I made on an Aberdeen stern trawler, we were away for 15 days. I am a fair weather fisherman, but I had to suffer every day and night of that appalling trip in a force 5 or force 6 gale. Every member of the crew should wear a safety helmet when working on the deck of a trawler under those conditions. If they are worn on construction sites, why not on the decks of trawlers?

As the Minister stated in reply to a question that I asked earlier this week, accident and death rates among fishermen are far higher than in coal mining or construction. If I am lucky enough to be on the Committee, I give the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan warning that that is the type of amendment that I shall seek to make. It is essential that fishermen working in that harsh environment, on the heaving deck of a trawler, often with unprotected deck machinery, should have the benefit of safety helmets. The hon. Gentleman said that if someone is knocked overboard unconscious, a lifebelt would help him. If he is wearing a safety helmet, he might not be bounced over the side.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Sea Fisheries Training Council. I had the honour to serve on the council as an educational representative. I was thrilled and privileged to be part of a movement that developed training so widely in the fishing industry. I regret to say that the Government decided that it had to go. It was set up by a Labour Government. However, in fairness—I am almost as even-handed as the Social Democrats—the Government have given money to the Sea Fish Industry Authority to continue the training, and it must be continued.

All fishermen must be trained in survival techniques — not only in fire-fighting precautions, but in fire-fighting techniques. All fishermen should be medically examined annually and all young fishermen should undertake survival and fire-fighting training.

What is the position of the Department of Transport on the recommended code of safety for fishermen? I declare an interest, in that I was a member of the committee that produced this important booklet in 1976. Is it still in print and is it still distributed to skippers? If not, why not? It is a first-class code of safety for fishermen. The Merchant Navy has a code of safety which is much thicker than this booklet. What is the Department's position on protective gear for fishermen, especially safety helmets? Has research been undertaken into the effect on the stability of vessels caused by the conversion to shelter decks? I am not a naval architect, but I have often wondered about the problems created by such conversions. I welcome anything that makes the job of fishermen easier, but what will be the effect on stability?

Who will police the regulations? It is all very well to say, "You will carry a safety harness and safety helmets for the members of your crew," but we must ensure that fishermen comply with the regulations. Will we have a seagoing fisheries factory inspectorate, or will we ask the fisheries protection service, which does an admirable job in other areas, to police the regulations? I foresee immense difficulties. We all know of people refusing to wear protective gear in land-based industries. The Bill does not tackle that problem, but I am sure that it can be amended in Committee. I wish to hear the Minister's views on that. It is not true that many of the clauses could be dealt with by way of statutory instrument?

The Bill must be amended to strengthen it, but I give it a most sincere welcome.

10.52 am

Mr. Alexander Pollock (Moray): I add my warm congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on securing first place in the ballot and on his choice of subject. Those of us who know him well are not surprised that he should have chosen to introduce a Bill on a subject that is dear to his heart. As a neighbour of his on the Moray coast, I can understand why. Like him, I have had the harrowing experience during my years in Parliament of visiting the bereaved, attending memorial services after the loss of vessels at sea and being conscious of the tragic heartache involved.

I pay tribute to my predecessor in the Banff part of my constituency, Mr. David Myles. He, too, took those duties seriously and discharged them with a quiet dignity that struck a warm chord on both sides of the House. It is also incumbent on me to pay tribute to the superintendents of the missions for the work that they do in those trying times, along with local ministers.

The concept of safety at sea and its promotion has, understandably, found support on both sides of the House today, and the Bill has an impressive list of supporters from all parties. It was also encouraging to see the number of hon. Members who visited the exhibition organised in the House yesterday, which enabled us to see the striking new equipment that is so relevant to the Bill.

I could summarise my position on the Bill by saying that I applaud its objectives, but I have several reservations about some clauses remaining in their present form. Perhaps I might deal with some of those in turn. In so doing, I join my hon. Freiend the Member for Wyre (Sir W. Clegg) in saying that I do not attack my hon. Friend's good intentions in drafting the Bill as he did. I know many of the restraints under which he had to work. However, as he recognised, some obvious flaws must be corrected and some definitions must be more tightly drawn.

Furthermore, if the Bill is to have the desired effect, Parliament must take the fishermen with it as far as it can. Given that there has not been full consultation with the leading fishermen's organisations, we must be ready to hear their point of view and do our best to work together to finalise legislation acceptable to all. I welcome the willingness of fishermen's leaders, such as Willie Hay and Sandy Baird, to enter into a dialogue with a view to making constructive suggestions as to how best to secure the passage of the Bill through the House in a form acceptable to the industry.

I am glad that my hon. Friend made it clear that the purpose of the Bill is to promote safety measures only on fishing vessels. Were that not the case, the Bill would be too wide-ranging and run the risk of attracting criticism from those with whom it is not primarily concerned.

Although clause 1, which deals with the provision of distress beacons, may not save the lives of fishermen, we should remember that it may lead to substantially fewer risks encountered by air-sea rescue services, such as the Nimrods from RAF Kinloss and the Sea King helicopters from RAF Lossiemouth, both in my constituency, and to which I also pay warm tribute for the work that they do. They are often required to search for long periods in wretched and dangerous conditions after a fishing vessel is believed to have gone down.

The clause will also help to relieve the heartache of the widows and parents ashore, many of whom have repeatedly told me of their anguish when their men's bodies cannot be found and brought home for a proper burial. Against that background, the cost of the beacon and the hydrostatic release seems small indeed.

Clause 3, which provides for the compulsory wearing of lifejackets, will be the most controversial measure. It is perhaps natural that an industry composed of individuals should be suspicious of such compulsory requirements. Men who spend their lives pitting their wits against the elements may think that they already take sensible precautions and resent being told what to do by Parliament. They have two key questions to ask. First, is there a design on the market which allows fishermen to carry out their essential duties with the minimum of discomfort and interference? Secondly, is there a design robust enough to withstand the normal rigours of their daily work? Many of us have seen the exhibition and tried on the new equipment. I hope that more facilities will be provided to allow such equipment to be readily seen and tried at first hand by fishermen round our coasts.

If there is such a design, could recent tragedies have been avoided by wearing such lifebelts? If there is evidence in the affirmative—I believe that there is—Parliament must be prepared to take the lead and, if necessary, impose its view on a suspicious industry. The parallel has been drawn with seat belts. I was a late convert to the compulsory legislation. To begin with, I considered it to be an intrusion on liberty, but the facts are chiels that win a day, and in this case clearly they have their place. The precise extent of any enforcement, the nature of any

[Mr. Alexander Pollock]

penalty and, more particularly, the question of upon whom any penalty might be imposed are surely matters better kept for further and fuller exploration in Committee.

With regard to clause 4, dealing with wheelhouse visibility, I am glad that my hon. Friend has made it clear that the clause cannot remain in its present form, that it will need substantial redrafting and that it will not apply to vessels already fishing. That will certainly allay a number of fears.

In conclusion, these few remarks will have shown my keen interest in the Bill, as well as my reservations about some of the clauses as they now stand. Those reservations can be fully explored in Committee. Meanwhile, I join in wishing the Bill, if not a wholly smooth voyage, at least a very worthwhile passage through the House.

It being Eleven o'clock MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

Westland plc

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the serious and damaging allegation by Mr. Alan Bristow last night that he was offered a knighthood if he would sell his shares in Westland, have you received any intimation of a statement from the Prime Minister today? If not, as the Leader of the House is in his place, will the right hon. Gentleman convey to the Prime Minister the wish of the House for an early and authoritative statement? There has been a denial by a No. 10 spokesman, but, as you know, Mr. Speaker, truth is stranger than fiction and misunderstandings occur. The matter should therefore be cleared up today ahead of a weekend of otherwise damaging speculation.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been authorised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to say that no authority to offer an honour to Mr. Bristow has been sought or given, and no approach has been made to my right hon. Friend that any such offer be considered. She has asked me to say that she would have dismissed any such approach out of hand as a total abuse of the honours system. No member of the Government nor anyone acting on their behalf has made any offer of an honour to Mr. Bristow or tried to bring pressure to bear on him in any way.

Mr. Shore: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do we understand from that statement that the Prime Minister was actually consulted on this occasion? Has she also consulted her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the chairman of Central Office?

Mr. Biffen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The statement is as I have said and contains the remarks that I have been authorised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to make.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a point of order. It is not in order to cross-question on a point of order. If the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) wishes to speak, it must be on a point of order to me.

Dr. Owen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is an increasing habit for points of order, which seem to be raised with some understanding between the two Front Benches, to be used as an excuse. These questions of patronage are extremely important. As one who has stood aside from the patronage system and not allowed my party to be involved in it, I feel that I am entitled to make some comments.

The Leader of the House, with the authority of the Prime Minister, has made a very full statement. There are many questions to be raised about patronage. We know that 11 private sector industrialists who received peerages from 1979 to 1985 worked for companies which gave £1,850,000 to Tory party funds and that 44 of the 64 people working in the private sector who received knighthoods contributed——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me. The right hon. Gentleman's opening words were entirely legitimate, but not his latter words.

Dr. Owen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible for statements of this kind—

they are, in effect, statements—to be made by the Leader of the House under the guise of points of order and then not to be subject to questioning? I believe that we have a legitimate——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was asked originally whether I had received any request for a statement to be made on this matter. I had not.

Dr. Owen: I wish to raise——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman well knows that he must raise points of order with me. I have ruled, and it is a well-known practice of the House that we cannot have an exchange on a point of order.

Dr. Owen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker I am referring to the way in which the House is being manipulated. The Leader of the House has read an authorised statement. I appreciate that you were not aware of what was happening and I am not in any way challenging you. I am questioning the practice between the two Front Benches whereby the shadow Leader of the House raises a point of order, as he is perfectly entitled to do and is right to do on a matter of such great importance, and this is followed by a detailed statement from the Leader of the House quoting the Prime Minister and using the authority of the Prime Minister. We are then asked to believe that we are not entitled to ask questions on that statement. This is the second time that it has happened this week.

Other parties in the House have rights, and the people of this country have rights. We are getting fed up with the conspiracy between the two Front Benches. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to protect the rights of minority parties and the wider public.

Mr. Speaker: I know nothing about conspiracies between Front Benches. I received notice of a point of order from the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who is on the Opposition Front Bench. That was perfectly legitimate. He asked whether I had received a request for a statement. I have received no such request. I fully understand the point made by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). It is up to him, if he wishes, to raise a point of order, which he has correctly done.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing further that I can say on this. It is not a matter for me. I will take a different point of order.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Without in any way associating myself with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), may I say that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) asked on a point of order whether you had received a request for a statement. The Leader of the House replied to that on a point of order but then went on to make a statement which seems to us to have had nothing whatever to do with the point of order.

If the Leader of the House or anyone else rises on a point of order to you, Mr. Speaker, but then proceeds to make a separate statement, is it not in order for you to allow him to be questioned on that statement? Is it not a gross abuse of the House for the Leader of the House to shelter behind a point of order to avoid being questioned on a substantive statement?

Mr. Speaker: It would not be in order for me to allow questioning, as that would be equivalent to allowing a private notice question or something of that kind. This was a point of order.

Mr. Straw: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is accepted practice that when Ministers, including the Leader of the House, make substantive statements, not about the procedure of the House but on a substantive issue, as this clearly is, Members have the right to question the Minister concerned. The Leader of the House has just made a clear statement on a substantive issue, but we are denied the opportunity of questioning him. How can we have an opportunity to question the Leader of the House on the statement that he has made?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that the usual channels, which are well recognised, are the place to ask for a statement on this important matter on Monday.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private Member's day. There is a statement to follow. There is nothing that I can say on this matter. It is not a matter for me. I am not party to a point of order or the response to it. It has nothing to do with me.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot answer questions on this. What can I say?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is nothing that I can say on this. I will take one more point of order from the Front Bench.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a different point of order.

The assurances from the Government would normally have been accepted had not the Prime Minister used the threat of withholding honours from civil servants who were in dispute during the Civil Service strike. There is an important point for the Chair. It must be a matter of great concern to the House and to you, as Speaker of the House, when such have been the activities of the Prime Minister and her Ministers—*[Interruption.]* This is a point of order, and I am coming to the point. Such a web of manipulation, evasion and connivance has been spun that even a hard-headed business man can seriously believe that a genuine offer was made to him.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is going into the substance of the matter. I know nothing about offers being made to anyone.

Mr. Williams: The important issue, Mr. Speaker, is that the integrity of the House, as well as that of the Government, is involved. What we have seen this morning is the inability of the House to question Ministers on an allegation that it is essential, in the public interest, to have clarified as quickly as possible before too much damage is done both to the Government and, more importantly, to the integrity of the House. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to tell us what action you can take to protect the integrity of the House. Secondly, I ask you to tell us whether you will ask the Prime Minister to make a statement on Monday.

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to ask the Prime Minister to make a statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As this is a private Member's day, I shall take one question from Back Benchers in equity to them. I call Mr. Heffer.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I ask for your guidance, Mr. Speaker, on a matter of procedure. I have always understood that whenever a Minister makes a statement in the House he has to do so on a point of order. That is done because the statement is being made during the normal proceedings of the House — for example, during a Second Reading debate or any other business. I have been a member of this place for 21 years and that has always been my understanding. The Minister having made a statement, Members have the opportunity to question him on it. It is your right, Mr. Speaker, to determine how long will be allocated to questions after the statement has been made, but when a statement is made surely Members have the right to ask the Minister questions on it.

Mr. Speaker: I am bound by the rules of the House, and the House knows that I am the custodian of those rules. The matter was raised with me on a point of order and I had no knowledge that the Leader of the House proposed to say anything. He indicated to me——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman indicated, following the point of order of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), that he wished to respond, and I allowed him to do so. I had no knowledge that that would happen. Mr. Peter Shore.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Another Front Bencher.

Mr. Peter Shore: I wish to be helpful, Mr. Speaker. I realise that you have been placed in considerable difficulty. It is true that I rose in my place on a point of order. My purpose was to press for the Prime Minister to make a statement. The Leader of the House then took the opportunity of making a statement. It has been properly said that, if a statement is made, it must be subject to further cross-examination under the rules of the House. That is why I took the liberty of asking a supplementary question. I assumed that the Leader of the House had made a statement. We are either dealing with a statement, or a half statement, or with a point of order.

In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the statement and our inability to pursue it further, I press again for a statement to be made by the Prime Minister later today and not on Monday.

Mr. Speaker: I have no responsibility for statements. If the Leader of the house wishes to make a statement, that is a matter for him, not for me. I dealt with the matter as a point of order.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Biffen: As this is a Back-Bench Members' day, I realise that there is anxiety to protect that part of the business. I recognise also the more general point of interest that has been raised by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). Therefore, I suggest that the matter is proceeded with through the usual channels.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. David Steel.

Mr. Steel: May I make a suggestion to you, Mr. Speaker, to which I do not ask you to react immediately? I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you read the report in the *Official Report* of these proceedings and the report of the proceedings that took place on Tuesday, when the Leader of the House made a business statement on a point of order. I ask you to read both reports and then to decide whether there should be a private discussion between yourself and the Leader of the House to stop the practice of statements being made in response to points of order.

Mr. Speaker: That is a wise suggestion, but I do not know whether I should be involved. Perhaps it is a matter in which all the parties should be involved.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need any help from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Skinner: On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need any help from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Skinner: This is a further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall allow the hon. Gentleman to raise his point of order if it is directed to a different subject. I ask him to bear in mind that this is private Members' time.

Mr. Skinner: I bear that in mind, Mr. Speaker. That is why I am concerned that those on the Front Benches have intervened on about six occasions while I have been in the Chamber attempting to raise a point of order. The occupants of the Front Benches should be concerned about Back Benchers' time as well. The Government should be concerned about Back Benchers' time. It is conceivable that if the business had proceeded in the proper way, the issue before us would have been dealt with by now.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that when the business statement was made the other day on a point of order, I took up the issue. I think you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that most of those in the Chamber at the time agreed with me and took it for granted that the practice of making statements in that way would cease. We have witnessed this morning another example of the Government Front Bench, and the Leader of the House particularly, taking the opportunity to get away with making a statement without that statement coming under close examination.

I believe that it is the job of Mr. Speaker at all times to protect the interests of those on the Back Benches as well as those on the Front Benches, whether they are Privy Councillors or not. I think, Mr. Speaker, that it would be wise if in future you used your discretion to ensure that you take the opportunity to penalise the Government, if they try to get away with this sort of tactic again, by allowing the House to question the Minister who has made the statement. If that is done, the Government will cease this practice.

Mr. Speaker: There is a good deal of sense in what the hon. Gentleman has said. I think also that the leader of the Liberal party has made a wise suggestion. We shall move on to the private notice question of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

Later——

Dr. Owen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. After consulting *Hansard*, may I say it seems that the only way

that you can be relieved of the predicament in which you have been placed by the Leader of the House, who made what was clearly a statement on a point of order, is for him to repeat that statement with any other additions that he might wish to make after business today. There are precedents for that procedure. I would urge that that course be adopted. Having heard that, perhaps the Leader of the House will now say that he will comply with the Orders of the House because he has breached them and placed you in a difficult and embarrassing position.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): He could do it now.

Dr. Owen: It would be preferable if he would do it now.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you clarify the difference of understanding about what constitutes a point of order? As I understand it, a point of order relates to procedure and not to the substance of any matter. When the Leader of the House rose, you were not to know whether he was courteously going to tell the House when the next statement about the matter he mentioned would occur. The House is aware that you in no way caused the difficulty, Mr. Speaker. In that case, would it not be for the benefit of all, and the procedures of the House, without taking any further time from private Members' business, for the statement to be repeated at 2.30 pm this afternoon so that the substance of the matter may be subject to the normal questioning after a statement?

Mr. Speaker: It is not the responsibility of the Chair to call for statements, but I take the point. I understood that the leader of the Liberal party suggested that such matters should be discussed through the usual channels. That is perhaps the best method of dealing with them.

Cocaine Kits (London)

11.17 am

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about what action he intends to take in response to the disclosure that cocaine kits are being sold in London.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I share the concern that is felt by right hon. and hon. Members over this attempt to make money through the encouragement of drug misuse. I understand that such kits are made up of everday articles, the sale of which is not in itself an offence. The police would, however, respond immediately to any suggestion that illegal drugs were being sold with these kits. I shall review again the practicability of making the sale of these kits a criminal offence.

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister will be aware that the entire nation must have been shocked to see on last night's television news, and to read in today's press, how easy it is to buy cocaine snorting kits in London, following complaints by some of my hon. Friends about a similar abuse in Scotland. Is he aware that my assistant visited Carnaby street this morning and saw displayed in the shop window of an establishment named "Carnaby Centre" several items which could be employed for drug use, together with a promise of more being available in the basement, which is blatantly named "The Head Shock". We note what the Minister has said, but we require some commitment for action.

We ask the Government to consider inserting an amendment in the Drug Trafficking Offences Bill, or a provision in the Budget, or both, to seek to prevent these activities. The Home Secretary is the police authority for London and he will understand that we expect action from him to stamp out this scandal.

Mr. Mellor: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I have been extremely grateful to the Opposition, including himself and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), for the assistance that they have given in facilitating the passage of the Drug Trafficking Offences Bill. I should like to have the chance of discussing this matter with him or the hon. Member for Erdington.

It seems that the problem of selecting the right vehicle for changing the law is not the central one. The problem lies in finding a way of penalising the sale of what is a collection of everyday items such as mirrors, which have a normal use. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that at a time when the entire community is outraged by the prospects of drug misuse—we saw on last night's news bulletin the damage that can be caused to newly born babies following their innocence in the womb by cocaine misuse—and the evidence that makes it clear beyond peradventure that cocaine is utterly destructive of life and not a champagne drug. Against that background, we should respond to the challenge and the affront to us all that is represented by the Carnaby street window display. I hope that we can have some discussions about that and bring forward a solution that the House would want to endorse.

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that this is a private Member's Bill day and, in fairness to the hon. Member for

[Mr. Speaker]

Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie), I must draw attention to the fact that the statement concerns cocaine kits being sold in London and nowhere else.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is considerable concern in greater London that such kits, which are clearly designed for one despicable purpose, are readily available in shops in greater London? Does he understand that his statement will be warmly welcomed, provided that it leads to prompt and effective action to deal with the problem once and for all?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): Surely the hon. Gentleman must realise that there is a big difference between items which are sold individually which have all kinds of uses and a pack which is specially produced containing items for the specific use of taking drugs.

Mr. Mellor: That is plainly the point that we must address in trying to see whether the prohibition can apply. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government supported the successful attempt of my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) last year to deal with the sale of glue-sniffing kits, although they contain the substance itself — glue — whereas these kits do not contain prohibited drugs. However, I assure the House that, having seen on my visit last April the problems that the paraphernalia cause in the United States, no one is more enthusiastic than me to find a workable way of outlawing it. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall set to the business of finding such an answer with appropriate vigour.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): Does not this incident suggest that the Government's approach to the drug menace is not on sufficiently broad a basis and that we should look at dangerous drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and cannabis, to see who is marketing them, to whom and why there is a demand for each of them? Ought we not then to tackle each of the different markets and encourage people to resist the temptation to buy the drugs and not only prevent people from selling them?

Mr. Mellor: That is exactly what we do. The Government have recently announced the continuation of a prevention campaign aimed particularly at heroin, that campaign having had most encouraging results for those most at risk — the teenage population. We have a sophisticated approach which recognises the differences between certain drugs and their attractiveness. I want to make it clear that, although we have focused on heroin as public enemy No. 1 in Britain, cocaine is every bit as grave in its impact and no one should be attracted to taking it by the fact that these rather twee little kits are available both here and across the Atlantic.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does not the information demonstrate yet again the alarming spread of drug misuse in London? Therefore, is it not sad that the special drugs money initiative launched by the Secretary of State for Social Services has largely bypassed London? Will he now make representations to ensure that facilities in the capital for combating drug misuse are increased?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in saying that money has bypassed London. It has not. He will know from his own community of the support that is being given to the City Roads project and to other community groups. Indeed, I visited Islington and sought to lend such weight as I have to the real efforts that are being made in his borough. I can assure him that the interests of London are in no sense being neglected.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my hon. Friend consider again whether existing powers give him the right to ban the sale of everyday items, bearing in mind that last year the Government used existing powers to ban the sale of 120 million erasers on the flimsy ground that they might encourage children to sniff them? Given the use of the powers then, why cannot exactly the same priorities operate for these kits?

Mr. Mellor: Obviously, as part of looking again at the problem I shall take account of that, but I want the House to understand that this is a matter that the United States has already had to confront. There is no federal law prohibiting the sale of such paraphernalia in the United States because of similar difficulties. A recent development that is of some use is a draft model that has been produced by the drug enforcement administration for use by individual state assemblies. Obviously, as part of our efforts to find an effective way of dealing with the matter in the United Kingdom, we shall want to look at that. However, I urge the House not to think that the banning of items in everyday use such as a mirror, which even hon. Members would acknowledge using occasionally in private moments, is an easy matter. We must be clear that we have made a distinction between those everyday items when sold together and those everyday items when sold separately.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The Minister and the Government lay great emphasis on the campaign that they are waging against drug abuse and the related activities, so why has it taken a television programme to highlight the problem in London before steps, in the form described in his statement, are taken? As the Government are taking steps in London, and as the Minister will have seen the early-day motion, will he put pressure on his ministerial colleagues for similar steps to be taken in Scotland as the same problem has existed there for some time now? The Edinburgh study, which I hope the hon. Gentleman has looked at, and the early-day motion, points surely to a causal link between the rising level of unemployment among young people and the rising use of drug abuse in Scotland.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman makes a variety of different points and I cannot deal with them all beyond saying that no link between the taking of drugs and unemployment has been established. The taking of drugs is much more closely linked to pressure from friends and curiosity.

Of course, a television programme was not needed to draw our attention to the problem. I have already made it clear that I have been aware of the problems of paraphernalia from my visit to the United States. But we have tackled the problem of drug misuse by establishing priorities. For instance, a Bill dealing with the important matter of drug traffickers' assets is going through the House. Now that it appears that the paraphernalia problem

is likely to be more of a feature in Britain than we expected might be the case, we shall obviously want to look again at the practicality of making it illegal. Not every dimension of a difficult problem such as drug misuse can be tackled at once and priorities have to be established.

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): There are Scots in London, and I am one of them. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) specifically mentioned Scotland. May I give some reflection on something which could be helpful?

Mr. Speaker: No. The hon. and learned Gentleman should ask a question, not give his reflection.

Mr. Fairbairn: Then let me ask a reflective question, Mr. Speaker. If a person invites someone into his shop to buy a bank robbery kit by advertising it, that would be a criminal offence at common law. Any assistance to commit a criminal offence is an offence. If someone invites a person into a shop to buy something which will help him to take a drug, that is also a criminal offence. Why are they not prosecuted in London?

Mr. Mellor: I am not sure that my hon. and learned Friend's knowledge of the law of England quite matches his knowledge of the law of Scotland. As I have said, we want now to look at the practicality of making the sale of such kits unlawful. I know that that will receive the co-operation of all parties in the House. If an easy and practicable way can be found, it will be inserted in legislation. It can be said about all hon. Members that we are wising up to the problem only after a television broadcast, but now that the House recognises that this is a problem that may require legislative action we must look with all appropriate expedition at ways in which that might be done.

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): I can understand the Minister's difficulty, but will he sit down and look again with the Metropolitan police at the film taken in Carnaby street and decide whether an offence was committed, because some of us believe that it was?

Mr. Mellor: If an offence was committed, I can assure the House that the police will be alerted to that and will need no prompting from me. I saw the film and it caused me considerable distress. I hope that I have shown to the House today that, just as we have tried to tackle with vigour other manifestations of drug misuse, we shall want to look at this one. That is something in which all of us will have a part to play.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): The hon. Gentleman referred to expedition. Will he discuss the problem with the Minister for Health? Cocaine sniffing and use of these kits in London have become socially acceptable. In 1983, there were fewer than 100 deaths from the taking of heroin, methadone and the hard drugs but, in the past three years, there has been a flood. The Minister is right to give cocaine abuse higher priority than all other drug abuses.

Mr. Mellor: The problem in the United Kingdom, as in other countries, is poly-drug misuse. Of the drugs that are misused, heroin is the most prominent, with amphetamines coming second. We have rightly been put on notice about the glut of cocaine available in South America and about the possibility of Europe becoming flooded with cocaine as a result of the drug traffickers' wish to develop a further market.

Although cocaine misuse remains a problem in the United Kingdom, in recent months there has not been the great growth in cocaine misuse that some had predicted. We are not at all complacent about that. Customs has four teams of specially designated officers to deal with cocaine, which has led to remarkable drug seizures. Obviously, we shall continue to look at all aspects of the cocaine drug problem, including this one, to ascertain whether more needs to be done.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, pending fresh legislation, there are powers under the existing law to deal with this specific case? First, will the hon. Gentleman consider the law relating to incitement? Prosecutions for incitement are relatively rare. The facts of this case may well give rise to a prosecution for incitement. Secondly, will he consider the analogy of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 in the offensive weapons-type case, where a perfectly innocent instrument becomes an offensive weapon and the onus of proof shifts? That power might also fit this case. Will the hon. Gentleman consider those two specific proposals?

Mr. Mellor: I know that the solicitor for the Metropolitan police will want to look at all the legal points that have been made. This reminds me somewhat of President Lincoln at the height of the civil war who, on being told how easy it was to deal with certain matters, said, "The trouble is that all the best generals are writing for the newspapers". I know that the solicitor for the Metropolitan police, whose grasp of the criminal law is, no doubt, more than adequate, will want to look at these points. If it is as easy as the hon. Gentleman has suggested, action will be taken. If it is not as easy as he suggested, as I suspect, it may be for us to take action. That is the gravamen of what I have been saying to the House.

Civil Service Unions (Political Funds)

11.31 am

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): I have been asked to make a statement concerning the position of non-industrial Civil Service trade unions and their possible establishment of political funds.

Political funds are unnecessary unless the Civil Service trade unions are proposing to participate in party political activities or to campaign for or against political parties or candidates. Provided this is not the main purpose of their campaign material or activities, they remain free, like other trade unions, to spend money from their general funds to promote and to defend their members' interests. This was the position before the Trade Union Act 1984 came into force and remains the position now.

If, wholly unexpectedly, unions were to experience difficulties in the courts on challenges that money had been wrongly spent from their general funds of activities to defend or improve their members' terms and conditions of employment, the Government would be ready to contemplate changing the law.

Any union that proposed to establish a political fund would have to consult its members by secret ballot. It is important that, in casting their votes, all union members are fully aware that a fund is not necessary unless party political activities are planned. Union members should know also that the creation of such funds will not be seen as in keeping with the political neutrality of a Civil Service that has to serve Governments of any political persuasion. Moreover, in the Government's view, political affiliation — a further but separate possible step — would run wholly counter to this need for political neutrality.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): Will the hon. Gentleman admit that the Government's view is that these ballots are not about affiliation to the Labour Party? Is he aware that the question that members of some Civil Service unions are about to answer is set by the certification officer, a Government official? Does he agree that members of the Civil Service unions in question are being asked whether they should be allowed, not forced, to pay into a political fund?

Will the hon. Gentleman agree that, if it is acceptable for companies which advocate and benefit from privatisation to have a voice in Parliament through their links with Members of Parliament, it is right for those workers who will suffer and have suffered from privatisation to have a view?

Is it not plain that the proposition in the statement— that, if a union is taken to court on the ground that its general funds had been wrongly spent on activities to defend or to improve its members' terms and conditions of employment and the union suffers a massive setback in the courts, the Government will then consider the position —is completely unacceptable? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that no union can possibly act on the basis of hope but no certainty that its activities are legal? The hon. Gentleman's comments are utterly and completely unreasonable.

Is it not quite staggering that the Government who have passed legislation and insisted on changes in the Trade Union Act 1913 have now made a statement which implies that they do not know what their own legislation means? If the Government are not sure what it means, how can the unions know?

As for the references to political neutrality, is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Civil Service Union and the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, both of which are about to hold a political ballot, are in the "politically free" category? Is he aware that, when the Post Office was a Government Department, the then Union of Post Office Workers, which is now the Union of Communication Workers, and the then Post Office Engineering Union, which is now the National Communications Union, had political funds? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the industrial Civil Service is represented by trade unions such as the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, and the Transport and General Workers Union, virtually all of which have political funds?

There can be no justification for the statement. The Minister should withdraw it at once.

Mr. Brooke: The reason why I made a statement was that I was asked to make one. I congratulate the hon. Lady on having asked a series of questions that was considerably longer than my statement.

The provision in the Trade Union Act 1984 which brought the 1913 Act up to date has not altered the freedom of trade unions to promote or to defend their members' interests where the main purpose of such activities is not party political. Questions on interpretation of that legislation are, of course, for my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Minister recall that, during the passage of the 1984 legislation, we constantly complained about the ambiguity in the legislation on balloting for political funds?

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): No.

Mr. Steel: Yes. We pressed for a clear indication in the law that people should be allowed individually to contract in to political funds for the purpose of supporting political parties. The Government refused to do that. They brought this ambiguity on themselves. Surely the current position is that the political funds are not wholly in existence to support political parties. Indeed, the unions have won the ballots on the basis of that statement. The Minister is wrong. Have not the Government doubly brought this ambiguity on themselves by creating such antagonism, generally and individually, in the Civil Service?

Mr. Brooke: The ambiguity to which the right hon. Gentleman refers does not exist. There has not been a change since the 1913 Act. It is for the right hon. Gentleman to demonstrate, in terms of the wording of the 1913 Act compared with the 1984 Act, that such a change has occurred.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Why has it taken more than five months and a threat of legal action for the Inland Revenue to confirm that it will meet the obligations imposed by the 1984 Act on every employer to co-operate in the arrangements for holding these ballots on political funds? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as the Inland Revenue Staff Federation has received legal advice which is the total opposite of the Government's

interpretation of the law, it would be better for the federation's members to establish a political fund in case a judge at some time in the future disagrees, as he would be entitled to do, with the Government's interpretation of the law? Is it not better for the union's funds to be safe than for the Government to be sorry?

Mr. Brooke: The requests from the Inland Revenue Staff Federation are essentially matters for the chairman of the Inland Revenue. The hon. Gentleman has referred to the correspondence between the concerned groups. To determine the amount of assistance that it is reasonable for a Government Department to provide for campaigns relating to a ballot for a political fund and conduct thereof is a serious question. We are dealing with a novel issue.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Does the Minister realise that his statement was misleading? Does he recall that the 1913 Act, which established the need for political funds within trade unions, was a means of trying to constrain political activity, and it in fact failed? Does he remember that his 1984 proposals tried to put that right and failed yet again? Is not the statement a means of trying to redeem what has already been a complete failure? Is it not a fitting finale to a week of catastrophe for the Government which will herald a change not just of Prime Minister but of the party in government?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman seems to be going rather wide of the question that I am addressing. I repeat that the law relating to political funds in the 1984 Act has not changed from that in the 1913 Act.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Is that not a bare-faced attempt by the Government to head off the prospects of a victory in the ballots organised by the IRSF and CSU to establish political funds to defend their members' interests against the constant denigration by the Prime Minister and her Government of the Civil Service role? How can the Minister claim that a political fund leads, inevitably, to party political affilitation when a few moments ago he drew the distinction between a political fund and affiliation to a political party? Will he confirm that it is open to any trade union to establish a political fund without affiliating subsequently to a political party?

Mr. Brooke: As I said in my statement, I acknowledge that separate issues are involved. The Government are making known their views about the establishment of political funds. Of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, provided the law is complied with fully, the matter is entirely for the members of the trade unions involved.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Minister confirm that the object of the exercise is to prevent Civil Service unions campaigning on issues which affect the future of their members? In those circumstances, is it not preposterous for him to suggest that he is not trying to inhibit such activity when he is talking about them spending money on the production, publication and distribution of any literature, document, film, sound recording or advertisement, the main purpose of which is to get people to do something—to wit, to vote? If the closure of a Civil Service unit is threatened directly by one political party and not the other, is it not absurd to say that the people working there cannot campaign and use their money to save those jobs by saying that they should vote for one person and not the other?

Mr. Brooke: My constituency neighbour has missed the point. The purpose of the statement is to make it clear that the activities which the hon. Gentleman has described are properly fundable out of general funds.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The Minister made the point that the general fund could be used as long as it was not used for party political purposes. Has not the change that has taken place under this Government in relation to the Civil Service become party political? Was not one of the Prime Minister's earliest phobias the Civil Service, with a selective public pay policy and her campaign against public sector pensions? Are not the Civil Service unions genuinely questioning how far they can use their general funds to protect themselves against the Prime Minister's meddling?

Mr. Brooke: The law remains the law. The purpose of the statement was to bring home the fact that the activities in which the Civil Service may wish to enter, provided they are not party political, can be funded out of general funds.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that as a result of his statement he has almost certainly given an added boost to the prospect of success in the ballots? Is it not a scandal that we have a Government who have been telling civil servants that it is their job to defend Ministers all down the line but that they are not allowed to defend themselves against the Minister by having a political fund? Why are civil servants picked out for special treatment? They occasionally have to suffer the sack. They have to fight for their wages. They have to do all the things that many other workers have to do. Some of them need to buy *Labour Research*, like the right hon. Gentleman the leader of the Social Democrats who used all the information from it this morning for the point of order that he raised.

Mr. Brooke: As I said in my statement, union members should also know that the creation of such funds will not be seen as being in keeping with the political neutrality of the Civil Service which has to serve Governments of any political persuasion. The Government have made the statement merely to have those issues of public interest in the public domain.

Safety at Sea Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.47 am

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): On behalf of my colleagues in the Liberal and Social Democratic parties, I warmly endorse the spirit of the Bill whose Second Reading was moved by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie). I have listened intently to all the speeches, and I have come to the conclusion that the standard of the debate that we have in this place on a Friday often exceeds by a long measure some of the party political dogma and dog-fights that we have on other days of the week.

I start by paying tribute, as other hon. Members have, to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he introduced the Bill. In a very short space of time, he has been assiduous in putting together a Bill dealing with detailed and important points. The House should rightly pay tribute to his continuing and genuine interest in a subject that affects not just his constituency but other parts of Scotland. Hon. Members have also referred to the exhibition that was organised in another part of the House earlier this week. It was extremely instructive. The hon. Gentleman also takes the credit for organising that exhibition.

The hon. Gentleman is correct in his main intention that underlies the essence of the Bill, which is that statutory requirements are now essential. I listened carefully to the remarks of the hon. Member for Moray (Mr. Pollock), who said quite rightly that we must attempt to take the industry and the fishermen with us on this matter. If there is disagreement and they do not want to operate statutory provisions, I believe that the House has a duty to take the lead and to make decisions, even if they are unpopular. However, we must obviously have full consultation with the industry.

Since coming to the House, I have been surprised at the amount of time that has, quite properly, been devoted to the structure of the fishing fleet, the common fisheries policy of the EEC, the details of quotas and so on. However, this is the first debate dealing with the specific question of safety at sea. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) made an interesting speech on the matter. I know that, to his credit, he has raised the matter during Question time and on other occasions. We are certainly not having this debate before time.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan say that yachts would be excluded from the provisions of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) has received a great deal of correspondence from the Royal Yachting Association, which has more than a passing interest in the Isle of Wight and yachting. In a letter on 3 February its chairman said:

"I can imagine riots on the ferries to the Island if all the passengers are made to wear life jackets in compliance with clause 3."

However, the hon. Gentleman's assurance should satisfy the RYA and other interested parties.

I hope that there will be full and proper consultation. I quite understand that constraints on time have made it difficult to examine the fine detail of the Bill. The hon. Gentleman has assured the House that he will consult on the detail before the Committee stage.

I hope that under clause 13, which deals with exemptions, we can include such events as local fishing festivals. The life jackets that are provided for in the Bill have been described as galluses that would suit the trousers of the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson). If the Eyemouth herring queen were to come round St. Abbs head in Berwickshire next year wearing galluses, that would somewhat detract from the festival — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is physically demonstrating the life jacket to the House. I do not believe that it would add much to the ceremonial dress of the festival queen and her attendants. Such fishing trips — often with children on board — are undertaken only in fine weather, and the festival committee is a responsible body. Therefore, I hope that the herring queen and her equivalents in other local festivals will not have to wear the contraption that the hon. Gentleman has just waved above his head. I think that some angling trips, such as deep sea fishing, should also be excluded.

Mr. McQuarrie: I assure the hon. Gentleman that clause 13 is a wide exempting clause. If the hon. Gentleman will remind me when we reach the Committee stage, we can discuss it then.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his helpful response.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the industry has suffered some recent financial difficulties. When the European directive on mesh sizes comes into operation, the industry will face further financial liabilities. Therefore, we must remember that additional costs for installing the equipment provided for in the Bill could cause added difficulties to the industry. I am, however, aware that there are grants and tax concessions, but the industry has had to face many increased on-costs, such as fuel, and smaller vessels have suffered most from that. I hope that if the industry can demonstrate that the on-costs will be a critical factor in the difference between wide acceptance or wide reluctance, the Government will reconsider the grants and other incentives available through the Sea Fish Industry Authority.

Mr. McQuarrie: I want further to clarify the point about exemptions. Clause 15 provides that vessels used other than for profit will be excluded.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is good news.

Fishermen, by nature, are antipathetic to any additional bureaucracy or impositions that they think are unnecessary. They have to take risks which I would certainly never willingly take. I suppose that they get used to living in dangerous conditions at sea and so become a little blase or perhaps even complacent. Therefore, the House is right to take a close interest in all aspects of safety at sea.

I am aware that not all sectors of the industry are happy about the Bill, but they should now be satisfied with the hon. Gentleman's assurances to consider the detail in Committee. The Government should respond positively to the Bill. The hon. Member for Wyre (Sir W. Clegg) said that the Bill could be used as a basis on which to provide for other aspects of safety in the fishing industry.

No one has yet referred to the need for helicopters, especially in the north-west of Scotland, the Western Isles.

Mr. Foulkes: British helicopters.

Mr. Kirkwood: Yes, we could use Westland helicopters. I know that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has been very active in trying to obtain helicopters for that area.

The problems of sea debris are tackled well in the Bill. It is a positive and constructive step, which the industry should welcome. I know that training aspects are also causing concern. If the Manpower Services Commission withdraws some of its current support, that will be quite unforgivable. The Government should carefully consider that. Indeed, I hope that the Minister will say something about it when he replies to the debate.

I agree with the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow about the provision of an immersion suit, although I know that the costs of that could create difficulties for the industry.

The Social Democratic and Liberal parties welcome the Bill and look forward to continuing our discussions in Committee. I hope that we will achieve a Bill which not only fits the requirements of the industry, but measures up to the real fears that have been expressed in this interesting and useful debate. At the end of the day, hon. Members have a responsibility for ensuring that there is adequate legislation to deal with the safety of our fishermen who go down to the sea and do business in great waters.

11.59 am

Mr. Gerald Malone (Aberdeen, South): I should like to add to the congratulations that have been heaped on my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie). This is an extremely worthwhile Bill. The House's only regret at its passing into law is that we shall be deprived of the sight of my hon. Friend walking the Corridors of the House clad in a variety of interesting life jackets and bearing a distress beacon, no doubt because it is difficult to find him from time to time.

Hon. Members know that my hon. Friend has provided us with great interest and a fair amount of amusement occasionally during the past few weeks, but that is not to denigrate the great efforts that he has made in a short time to impress upon us the importance of the Bill. The Bill addresses an extremely serious matter, as those of us with constituency fishing interests are only too prepared to acknowledge.

My hon. Friend has been sensible to introduce a Bill that tackles several straightforward but nevertheless important issues. Clause 1 deals with distress beacons, the provision of which could have saved a great deal of time finding vessels in trouble. Delay has caused substantial loss of life. It is sad that the industry, which could have reduced the loss of life, has not acted as quickly as it should have done. We have an obligation to support legislation such as this if industries do not voluntarily take steps to reduce death or injury.

As for inflatable life rafts, my hon. Friend's useful provision will impose little cost on the industry. He was at pains to stress that little cost will be imposed on the industry or the masters of vessels by the Bill. Nevertheless, the changes will be exceptionally useful. He has given examples of how life could have been saved if such devices had been fitted.

There is some anxiety about clause 4, which deals with wheelhouse visibility. My hon. Friend has explained that vessels currently in use will not have to be modified except when they go into dock for substantial repair, and that the provisions will apply to new vessels. That explanation is useful. I am confident that the anxiety that the industry would face prohibitive expense, or that vessels would not be able to set to sea, as soon as the legislation went on the statute book will have been substantially relieved.

As for load lines, I cannot help but contemplate that, as a Mr. Plimsoll became rather famous for a certain piece of legislation, we might have the McQuarrie line when clause 5 becomes law. Perhaps the Bill itself will act as a testament to what my hon. Friend is doing. It has been said that it might be difficult to apply load lines at sea. My hon. Friend addressed that point when he said that inspectors would be able to see clearly whether vessels were overloaded when they came back to port. The Bill will encourage a habit among the fishing industry where there is none at present. The practice of overloading is occasional, but it would stop if it were known that there was a possibility of inspection and prosecution for regular overloading.

Mr. Fairbairn: I am worried about clause 5. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) fell into my trap earlier. There is a difference between loading a vessel in flat water, where it can be seen when the weight pushes the McQuarrie line, if that is the appropriate thing, under the water, and loading the vessel with fish at sea, where there is not the slightest possibility of knowing at what point, were the water flat, which it most certainly is not, the line would be beneath the water. The test which my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) has suggested is that some nasty official can see that a vessel's McQuarrie line is below the surface back in the safe water of Aberdeen harbour. How is the fisherman to discover that the vessel is below the line when he gets back if he cannot tell when the load is put on?

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend, who represents farming interests. If he represented fishing interests he would understand that fishermen know to the last cod what they can load. That is certainly true of those who sail out of Aberdeen harbour. The Bill would introduce a habit of not stretching the limit and therefore incurring danger. We are encouraging good habit and good practice. My hon. and learned Friend's fears will not be realised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan made another important observation. An increasing amount of gear is put on the decks of vessels, and it would be useful for the operators to see the effect that the gear has on the vessel's ability to contain the catch.

The provision of approved life jackets speaks for itself. The ones that I have seen in the useful demonstration that my hon. Friend has made available to hon. Members show that they are not the cumbersome items of apparel that they once were. They will not inhibit fishermen from carrying out their duties. Once again we are encouraging a good habit. My hon. Friend used the analogy of safety belts. Clunk-click every trip in the car has become a habit as well as a statutory requirement, and I believe that people would continue with the practice even if it were not legally required. I am not sure whether clunk-click is the right description, but the habit of wearing a life jacket will eventually become difficult to break.

I have some worries about the provisions concerning debris at sea. I accept what my hon. Friend said about the difficulties of drafing legislation, especially at such short notice, but, as drafted, there is absolute liability. It will

[Mr. Malone]

be difficult to continue that. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that up in Committee. Some element of negligence must be introduced for fishermen who sometimes have to cut gear or throw items overboard because of problems might be put in some difficulty. I know that my hon. Friend will address that matter in Committee.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on presenting the Bill in one of the most able and comprehensive Second Reading speeches that I have heard. I do not want to make any allusions to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, but if legislation were introduced on the same lines as my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan has suggested in his Bill, the House would be most grateful. I congratulate him and wish him every success.

12.9 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I join hon. Members in all quarters of the House who have congratulated the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on his good fortune in the ballot and, especially, on his choice of subject for a private Member's Bill. It is no pun when I say that we shall give the Bill a fair wind.

One of the strengths of the House of Commons is that hon. Members come from different backgrounds, occupations and areas. It is amazing how, when hon. Members visit a constituency with which they have had no contact before their election, they become immersed in its work and begin to recognise the fears and anxieties of the constituents. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and I probably know better than most the psychology, fears, anxieties, kinship, family affinities and communities of the fishing industry as we both come from fishing families. There were fishermen on both sides of my family. My late father went to sea at the age of 11 as a cook on the family drifter, Restless Wave, which sailed from Pittenweem. I spent many happy holidays as a youth, and even went to school for a short time, at Whitehills in the constituency of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. Therefore, we have strong family connections with fishing, and when we hear of vessels, such as the Bon Ami, going down, it is not simply a statistic or a name flashed across the television screen, but families we have known for generations. We understand that kinship, and the heartaches of families whose kinfolk are at sea, waiting in weather such as we have today and wondering whether they will return.

Fishing has always been a hard and dangerous job and a tough life. My father always said to me, "Never go to sea." He would not necessarily have approved of my present occupation, but I am sure that he was glad that I never went to sea as a working fisherman. Conditions have improved and vessels are bigger and better built. There are much better navigational aids, weather forecasting and weather radio communications are better, and the work, which is still hard, has been helped by the invention and widespread use of hydraulic winches. Nevertheless, it is still a hard and dangerous business.

The statistics are chilling, and each time they are produced we wonder why they have not improved. I pay tribute to Dr. Mark Reilly of the department of community medicine at Dundee university, whose research work has helped to concentrate our minds on and brought together the facts. The loss of life and ships gives us great cause for continuing anxiety. The reports make it clear that fishermen are on average four times more likely to die in accidents than miners, and we have always regarded mining as the most dangerous occupation. Indeed, the mortality and accident rates for fishermen are much higher than for construction workers. Moreover, in mining and construction, the mortaliity and accident rates are improving, whereas in fishing they continue to grow worse.

Mr. McQuarrie: In paying tribute to Dr. Reilly, would the hon. Gentleman not also wish to pay tribute to Professor Mair of Dundee university who has worked hard with Dr. Reilly to produce this essential information about the industry?

Mr. Hughes: I gladly join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Professor Mair.

It is a fact of life that when a vessel is lost with its entire crew, it attracts the attention of the media, and involves the public. However, many individual fishermen go overboard, and they do not attract the same attention. Nevertheless the tradegy to the family is as great. We should not neglect to mention that, besides the loss of life, we are considering the severe accidents and injuries caused at sea. They must also be kept at the front of our minds. That is why I particularly welcome clause 9, which makes provision for a report to Parliament on all aspects of safety at sea, and for proposals for the improvement of existing regulations relating to safety at sea. We need a report, not merely "from time to time", but annually. I hope that in Committee the hon. Gentleman will accept an amendment to that effect.

Mr. Fairbairn: Parliament is well aware of road accidents and injuries. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when putting in scale the extent of accidents and injuries at sea, we should remember that road accidents and injuries are minute compared with accidents and injuries at sea?

Mr. Hughes: I agree with the facts. I am not sure what conclusion the hon. and learned Gentleman draws, but my conclusion is that it does not make any difference whether 10, 15 or 1,500 people are lost, because we are concerned with safety and the prevention of death or injury, wherever it may occur.

One may draw an analogy between fishermen and motorists, in that they regret it when the law impinges on their activities and makes them do something which, to begin with, they regard as an infringement. The compulsory wearing of seat belts has attracted a great deal of publicity and many complaints, and there will undoubtedly be some expression of anatagonism about wearing lifejackets. But the number of lives saved and serious injuries prevented through wearing seat belts is a good example of how wearing lifejackets can have the same effect.

We need perpetual and eternal vigilance over safety at sea. It is many years since the Holland Martin report followed from the loss of the trawlers, the St. Romanus, the Kingston Peridot and the Ross Cleveland in 1968, all of which foundered within a period of 26 days. That was a spectacular event. The report produced many important recommendations, most of which are now incorporated in

statute, but that was 18 years ago. We cannot simply produce a report on safety at sea when we have a series of major tragedies which excite public interest. I hope that we shall have annual reports.

Clause 5, which deals with load lines, has aroused much discussion. It may be argued that it is difficult to judge the load line, especially at sea when the water is never calm and the vessel is rolling, but too much is being made of that. Fishermen know within a relatively safe approximation how much fish they are carrying. Indeed, most of them know when the vessel is overloaded. But we need to compel them to take more cognisance of that, and to ensure that the pressures on them do not tempt them to go beyond the safety limit.

The matter is not as complicated as people suggest. I am no naval architect—I am sure that naval architects would tear my theories to pieces—but when a vessel is designed the designers have two points in mind. The first is stability. I believe that there is something called the stability line. As an engineer, I would call it the centre of gravity. We know precisely what the stability line is.

Naval designers have also to calculate what the roll of the vessel is, both loaded and unloaded, in different conditions. Clearly, there must be a calculation for the freeway, which has to be worked out in calm water levels. It is the level of the water compared to the height of the gunwale, so that, when the vessel rolls, it does not dip under and founder.

Those two calculations must be in the design of the vessels. In the more sophisticated shipyards there will be model testing. Much information is available. I am sure that the calculation can be done to provide a load line that is much more visible than the present Plimsoll line, which is a circle with three lines drawn through it. These lines represent tolerances in relation to when the ship is ballast or fully loaded. A broad band running two thirds around the hull of the fishing vessel could be used as a guide when the skipper is wondering how much fish he can take on board. I am sure that can be accommodated.

Mr. Fairbairn: I am concerned about this matter. I can understand that overloading a ship could put it at peril. Of the accidents of which we know, is there any suggestion that the cause was that the catch had overloaded the ship to such an extent that it foundered?

Mr. Hughes: Agreat deal of research is going on into that, and I hope that the Minister will tell us what research is going on in his Department. One of the difficulties is that it is rare to find a vessel that founders at sea. In many cases, when the vessel has gone, its precise location will not be found. One does not know the exact conditions in that spot, never mind the loading of the vessel. All these imponderables have an effect. There are accidents such as that of the Bon Ami, but that was a different case. Usually the vessel rolls in the sea, goes down, and nothing is known for several days.

A number of measures must be examined. There must be more rigorous regulations about reporting in. It is not unknown for skippers who have found a good shoal of cod not to report in because, if the news came over the airways, like seagulls other vessels would join, although that may be a rare occurrence. Reporting in would help to alert people to vessels foundering, especially if the men are afloat in water or on a liferaft. If they do not report in by a certain time, the Nimrod spotter aircraft and other vessels in the North sea could be on the lookout for them.

Clause 8, which concerns training for survival at sea, must be strengthened so that all entrants, not just new entrants, undergo survival courses as well as safety courses, which are also extremely important.

The new lifejackets are extremely easy to wear. The mobility and dexterity of those wearing them are not affected. We have been speaking jokingly about galluses. In case anybody needs a translation, they are braces. It is a pity that those who have not seen the exhibition will not know what the jacket looks like. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is holding one up, so hon. Members can see that it is compact. It would not affect people's movements or agility.

We need to incorporate a clause about medical examinations. In an occupation as dangerous as that of a fisherman, health can be extremely important. Therefore, I hope something can be done about this. I understand that Dr. Renfrew, who for many years was the port medical officer at Grimsby, has compiled a set of standards based on his experience. I hope that, as a result of that, regular health examinations will be required.

We can never eliminate the loss of life or of vessels. Fishermen describe lumps of water that suddenly descend on a ship in bad weather. Even design, security and the acumen of the skipper in charting his vessel through heavy waters cannot eliminate that. The Bill, however, deserves support.

I am disappointed in the SFF. I know Willie Hay, Gilbert Buchan and the others as well as anybody. I am sorry that they have taken a rather negative attitude towards the Bill. I should have been happier if they had taken the same view as that of the Transport and General Workers Union, which wrote to me to say that it gave its full support to the Bill. No doubt, it will suggest constructive amendments, but that care and interest in its members should be copied by the SFF. The Bill deserves support to prevent accidents to, and loss of life in, fishing vessels. I give it my full-hearted support, although we shall have to work hard in Committee to make it even better.

12.22 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on his initiative in introducing a Bill dealing with safety at sea, particularly the safety of fishermen and fishing vessels. I congratulate him also on his vigorous and persuasive exposition of the principles of the Bill, both in the Chamber today and to hon. Members in other parts of the House over the past fortnight. It is easy to be in favour of greater safety—who is not? The important distinction to be made is between those for whom this is merely an empty slogan and those who, like my hon. Friend, the Government and the fishing industry, are prepared to do something constructive to promote greater safety. Government and industry will continue to work closely on this, and I welcome the contribution that the Bill can make.

Last year I had direct responsibility in the Department of Transport for shipping matters, including fishery safety, and I was deeply concerned at the number of fishing vessels that were lost. The House has already heard that total losses between 1975 and 1984 inclusive come to some 424 vessels, and I confirm that, alas, those figures are correct. Happily, many of those losses of vessels did

[Mr. David Mitchell]

not involve injury or loss of life, but nevertheless this is still a serious problem. It must involve risk to lives, and we recognise the need both to ensure safety at sea and to improve the prospects for saving the lives of those involved in accidents.

It may be helpful if I give the exact figures of accidental deaths. They include those who died from drowning and also from other causes—for example, accidental death caused by machinery. Unfortunately, during the period 1976 to 1984 inclusive the number of deaths on fishing vessels of 24m and over amounted to 70. On fishing vessels of under 24m the number of deaths amounted to 175. The total of deaths during that nine-year period amounts, therefore, to 245.

I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in saying that these figures are unacceptably high. The number of deaths led me last year to meet the sea fishing safety group. At that meeting I called for further active work to be carried out into the causes and prevention of accidents in the fishing fleet.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan rightly drew attention to the widespread concern about the tragic loss of life in some recent casualties in the Scottish fishing fleet. In February 1985 the Mhairi L sank in the Irish sea with the loss of its five crew. The Department has issued a report which, among other things, supports two of the proposals in my hon. Friend's Bill—the carriage of emergency position—indicating radio beacons and the fitting of automatic release arrangements on inflatable life rafts.

I join my hon. Friend in his sadness and sympathy for the relatives. I personally met some of them in my room in the House. At their request, I arranged for an underwater film that had been taken when the vessel was located on the sea bottom to be shown in Scotland. I confirm that all the evidence shows that the crew of the Mhairi L were on deck. That has relevance for the Bill.

The Ocean Harvest sank off the north-east coast of Scotland in October 1985 with the loss of its crew of four. Most recently, and sadly, in December 1985 the Bon Ami ran aground off the north-west coast of Scotland. All of the crew of six were lost when the vessel broke up and sank, despite the gallent efforts of other fishing vessels to rescue them. Again the whole House has a sense of sadness and sympathy for the relatives of those involved. My Department is still investigating the two latter cases.

Experience suggests that losses are almost always due to a combination of circumstances. It is rare for there to be a simple cause with simple conclusions which would prevent further tragedies. Nevertheless, my Department is determined to establish as far as possible the reasons for these casualties and to see what lessons can be learned for the future.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) suggested that we should publish a full, detailed account of the investigation in the case of the Mhairi L and other vessels. It may help hon. Members if I explain the position. If we were to publish a full, detailed account of our preliminary investigation, people who in some way might have contributed to the accident would be inhibited from giving us a full, factual account of exactly what happened, because legal complications or charges of negligence might arise from their being outspoken. Our purpose is to get to the cause of the accident, to draw what lessons we can from understanding the cause and to make consequential recommendations.

If everything that everybody said were to be taken down and could potentially be used as evidence against them, we fear that people would be inhibited from coming clean on every aspect that they knew about. Therefore, we allow people to talk in confidence without the fear of exactly what they said being exposed in a report. However, we publish a report which gives an analysis, to the best of our ability, of our assessment of the causes of the accident, so that we may make the necessary recommendations that will help to prevent future accidents.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I have not looked at the details for some time, but after an inquiry it is possible that a skipper may lose his certificate. How does the preliminary inquiry fit in with that possibility? If there is the possibility of culpability or negligence being proved, everybody will be careful about what they say.

Mr. Mitchell: Perhaps it would be helpful if I wrote to the hon. Gentleman in some detail. As I have set out, the principle is to get to the bottom of the cause with the least inhibition on people contributing as fully as possible to help us to identify it. I am sure that we are agreed that that is the right way to proceed to obtain the maximun information possible.

It is helpful to put the proposals in the Bill in the context of the Government's record in promoting greater safety at sea and on fishing vessels. One matter which is clear from the record and which I believe should be emphasised is the prime importance of consultation with the fishing industry before safety rules are introduced, and close co-operation with the industry to ensure that rules are fully enforced. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan will agree that there should be active consultation before and during the Committee stage.

Although safety is important, we must not lose sight of the costs for the Government and the industry, neither of which has a bottomless pocket. Before new safety rules are introduced, it is essential to ensure that, in a widely fragmented industry, full consultation is carried out to ensure what is practicable and cost effective. For that reason, and because of the speed of technological change, it is necessary to draft safety requirements in primary legislation without going into too much detail.

I shall comment later on some of the specific proposals in the Bill, but in that context I should mention that hydrostatic release units are now available in a form that need no servicing. They can be thrown away at the end of their useful life rather than be serviced at considerable expense. This illustrates the importance of allowing regulations to specify what type of equipment should be carried on a vessel, so that primary legislation is not overtaken by technological change. I am sure that hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan, will recognise that fact. Old-fashioned and out-of-date concepts enshrined in legislation can be inhibiting, because we would have to wait for the opportunity of primary legislation to make the necessary changes required by modern technology.

It is now more than 10 years since the Department introduced safety requirements for the construction and equipment of fishing vessels of 12m in length and over. That action was prompted by the high level of fishing

vessel losses at the time and the recommendation of the commitee of inquiry into trawler safety in 1969. Following the committee's recommendation, detailed requirements were introduced in the Fishing Vessels (Safety Provisions) Rules 1975 covering the design and construction of fishing vessels, including stability, weathertight integrity, structural strength and structural fire prevention, and their machinery and essential equipment, such as navigational aids, lifesaving equipment, fire extinguishing appliances and radio. Those rules applied to new vessels and to those in service. As a result, no fewer than 2,000 vessels had to be surveyed, which entailed an immense amount of work. I pay tribute to the work of the surveyors of the Department of Transport for carrying out what was not always an easy task.

The surveys were supposed to be renewed every four years, with periodic inspections in between. The initial surveys, with minor exceptions, have all been carried out, but it took almost 10 years to achieve, against the six years originally envisaged. Even then, it was necessary to defer the first renewal survey for a further four years. In spite of the length of time that it has taken to complete, I regard that as a significant achievement for the industry and the Department. It is also a cautionary tale. Unsurprisingly, fishermen do not always see eye to eye with us on the application of statutory requirements.

Mr. McQuarrie *indicated assent.*

Mr. Mitchell: I see that my hon. Friend agrees with me. However, over the years, especially through the work of the fishing industry safety group, which is widely representative of the interests of the industry, mutual respect and co-operation have increased in the common pursuit of improved safety at sea. At the same time, we have come to recognise that to reach declared objectives may take much longer and be more expensive than was first thought.

Objectives must be realistically defined, and a line must be drawn between what can be done and what should be done in an ideal world. What would have happened to the timetable for implementing the 1975 rules if, instead of catering for fishing vessels of 12m and more, the line had been drawn so as to include the remaining 5,000 fishing vessels within the statutory system of surveys? From the experience of how long it has taken to achieve surveys on 2,000 vessels, we must ask where we draw the line in seeking to apply regulations to all vessels, as some parts of the Bill do. We shall wish to consider that in Committee. We must remember that we could achieve perfect safety by the simple expedient of driving the owners of smaller vessels out of business altogether.

There has been insufficient improvement in the fishing industry's safety record, although progress has been made in some areas. The House will be interested to hear the statistics of non-fatal accidents on fishing vessels of 24m and over. In 1976 there were 813 such non-fatal accidents; in 1977 there were 609; in 1978 there were 573; in 1979 there were 413; in 1980 there were 207; in 1981 there were 97; in 1982 there were 90; in 1983 there were 64; and in 1984 there were 73. Members will realise that a reduction from 813 to 73 during nine years is at least an encouraging sign that progress has been made in that area, although there is still an unacceptable level of loss in the fleet and a completely unacceptable number of fatalities. However, the extended timetable for the completion of the existing statutory survey requirements for larger fishing vessels has delayed the full benefits of that programme for major vessel losses.

In response to the recommendations of the Holland Martin committee of inquiry and to other initiatives, the Department has taken other steps to promote the safety of fishing vessels and fishermen. I assure the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that a comprehensive code of safety practice is available to fishermen. It was published in 1978, together with an illustrative safety booklet, which has recently been revised in consultation with the industry. I have here a copy of the booklet, which is obtainable at a cost £1·50 from Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

I would also mention the medium wave, open line, ship-to-shore radio link for fishermen funded by the Department of Transport to provide a special listening watch and communications for vessels working in the North sea beyond the range of the Coastguard's VHF radio facility on the coast. The Department also funds a special three-day weather forecast for the North sea fishing fleet.

New regulations for the certification of skippers, second hands and engineers have recently been made to improve standards. In co-operation with——

Mr. Donald Stewart: On the radio link, it is well known in fishing ports that some skippers do not take advantage of it, although their vessels might be at sea for a week, because they are afraid of giving away the area in which they are fishing at any time. However, I agree that it is a useful aid.

Mr. Mitchell: I wholly agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I have said both in the House and to the fisheries safety group that it is unsatisfactory that resources should be put into providing a service if people do not use it. I shall certainly value any encouragement that the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan, with their close contacts with the fishing industry in Scotland, can give to the use of the system. There is no point in incurring the expense for the provision of resources if those for whom the service is intended do not use it. I join the right hon. Gentleman in saying that not nearly enough use is made of the facility, which would help considerably in ensuring greater safety for vessels at sea.

I have mentioned that the Department funds a special three-day weather forecast for the North sea fishing fleet and the new regulations for certification of skippers, second hands and engineers. In co-operation with the National Maritime Institute, the Department has produced films on the safety of fishing vessels with special regard to stability. These films have been widely shown and appreciated both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Until recently, I had responsibility for the Coastguard service. One of the things that I was most anxious to achieve was cross-referencing of VHF distress calls. In the modern, much more sophisticated stations, instead of visible watching from the coast we have encouraged the installation of VHF radio on any vessel going out to sea within our coastal areas. Again, I stress the importance of using this facility as an absolute must for the safety of those on board.

We have had a system which enables us to identify the direction from which a distress call comes on a given line. We are now installing other stations which can also pick

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up the signals so that we can cross-reference by reference to a second line. Knowing where the two lines cross will enable us to identify much more precisely the area from which the distress call comes. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan will appreciate that additional safety facility. As a result of my insistence, I can today announce that by the end of this year five extra direction-finding systems will be in use in Scotland. This will be a considerable aid to search and rescue within the 30-mile limit around the coast.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the Coastguard service. My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan is absolutely right to seek to improve safety at sea and to increase te ability of people to survive with life belts, arrangements for identification of vessels, and so on. The constant watchfulness of the coastguards—both auxiliary and full time—who silently and without much public recognition constantly monitor and watch for distress signals, ready to send the search and rescue operation into action, is a service to which the Whole House will wish to pay tribute.

The timing is peculiarly fortunate in that in making that tribute to the Coastguard service I can pay special tribute to Tim Fetherston-Dilke, the chief coastguard, who is retiring after some 20 years in the service. I am sure that the House will wish me to record our appreciation of all that he has achieved and to wish him a long and happy retirement after a job well down.

We cannot rest on our laurels. When I had direct responsibility for marine matters. I opened a dialogue with members of the fishing safety group on what more needed to be done, and I am sure that that will bear fruit in due course. I commissioned research into the causes of fishing vessel casualties, and that will result in a report that will be available to the fishing industry safety group for its April meeting. I think that that will prove a useful means of examining closely a number of important issues.

The Department is carrying out, in close consultation with the industry, a comprehensive review of the 1975 fishing vessel rules to ascertain what changes need to be made. I am sure that it will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan to hear that emergency position-indicating radio beacons, automatic release arrangements for inflatable life rafts and life jackets on fishing vessels below 12m are all under consideration already for further improving safety on fishing vessels. Due to my hon. Friend's decision to introduce the Bill, we have an opportunity to make progress in a number of these areas.

I was glad to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan confirm that his interest is in fishing vessels only and not in pleasure craft. Safety on yachts is important, but there are significant differences in the way in which fishing vessels need to be treated for safety purposes. I think that it is sensible for my hon. Friend to concentrate on fishing vessels on this occasion.

So that some of my remarks on the more specific proposals in the Bill are not misunderstood or regarded as criticism of my hon. Friend's intentions, I wish to emphasise how much of what he proposes is in train, is being done by my Department, or is under active consideration. It is fortunate that my hon. Friend has secured legislative time by his good fortune in the ballot for Private Member's Bills, which has enabled us to move forward rapidly. The Government believe that amendments can be introduced in Committee that will lead to substantial improvements to the Bill and, therefore, pave the way to improving safety on fishing vessels.

I think that we all recognise how difficult it is for Back Benchers to draft Bills. Any Back Bencher who has tried to draft a Bill, as I have, will appreciate the difficulties. I congratulate my hon. Friend on having tackled the substantial difficulties that are involved. However, there are a number of amendments that I hope he will feel able to accept. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mr. Pollock) drew attention to the need for some of them.

Clause 1 is directed to distress beacons and provides for the compulsory carriage of EPIRBs. I am glad to say that, subject to redrafting to ensure that the provision relates only to fishing vessels in excess of 12m, the Government can accept the proposal. Indeed, they welcome it.

There have been many sudden and tragic losses at sea when the vessel, for whatever cause, may have been unable to send a distress message in any form. A radio-alerting beacon that would float free from the stricken vessel and automatically set an alarm has been seen by my Department as an urgent need. Despite much work being undertaken here and abroad, that goal could not be achieved using the conventional terrestrial radio systems. However, with the advent of satellites there has been a dramatic change, and we are on the threshold of one of the most significant contributions to maritime safety since the introduction of radio.

The signal from a radio beacon can be detected by an over-flying satellite, processed and passed down to a ground station, which in turn alerts search-and-rescue operations. The local user terminal is at Lasham, and it will be able to receive signals from distress beacons in virtually the whole of the search-and-rescue area for which the United Kingdom is responsible. Supplemented by similar terminals in Norway and France, it will be possible to cover all of the area in which our fishing vessels are likely to operate. From these signals it will be possible to identify the stricken vessel and locate its position to within 1 or 2 nautical miles.

Mr. Fairbairn: What is the magic of 12m? I should have thought that the smaller the vessel, the greater the risk. Why will vessels below 12m be exempted?

Mr. Mitchell: The exact size of the vessel will be given careful consideration in Committee. Expenditure will be incurred and we must ensure that some boats going around within easy sight of the coast are not compelled to carry equipment which may be of greater value than the boat itself. One must be realistic, but I agree that that point should be examined. I am not dogmatic about 12m being the right length.

Mr. McQuarrie: The point raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) is covered in clause 6 on vessels of less than 12m.

Mr. Mitchell: We can look at such matters closely in Committee. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for replying to the point.

A specification for the distress beacon is being worked out urgently so that manufacture in quantity can begin. Three British firms have produced prototypes which the Department has used to evaluate the system. It is hoped

that full-scale production can begin within a year. We shall have to consider in Committee the appropriate time for the introduction of that requirement in connection with the equipment on the appropriate wavelength for the Lasham monitoring arrangements. Clearly it would not be particularly appropriate to require it in respct of wavelengths which cannot be picked up with a system which is coming on stream so shortly.

Clause 2 provides that life rafts with automatic release equipment should be carried by a wide range of vessels. The Government cannot accept that requirement in respect of vessels other than fishing vessels, and then only with some qualifications. The present regulations already require that every fishing vessel of 12m in length and over must carry lifeboats or life rafts to accommodate at least the total number of persons on board. Fishing vessels of less that 12m are not at present required to carry life rafts, but they must carry lifebuoys. That requirement is at present under review. The Department is consulting the industry and has commissioned a research project which will deal, among other things, with the optimum siting of life rafts on board fishing vessels—a problem which is particularly relevant to small vessels.

My Department has for some time strongly recommended owners of fishing vessels to fit hydrostatic release units to all life rafts. We have not, however, introduced statutory requirements similar to those for merchant ships. This is because there are a number of practical difficulties which have to be overcome. The research project is addressed to these. When we have the results, and after proper consultation with the industry, we intend to make regulations that would make the carriage of life rafts mandatory in prescribed cases. I should emphasise that these requirements would relate to automatic release arrangements for life rafts and not simply hydrostatic release units. We cannot rule out that other float-free systems may be acceptable, or even preferable, for fishing vessels.

In summary, subject to appropriate amendment, the Government welcome clause 2 and would propose to use it to introduce regulations requiring the fitting of automatic release arrangements for life rafts as soon as practicable.

Clause 3 requires that persons in a wide range of vessels should at all times when on deck at sea wear an inflatable lifejacket of an approved type. The existing regulations already provide for the carriage of lifejackets on fishing vessels of 12m and over, and lifebuoys on fishing vessels of any lesser size, but the regulations do not require lifejackets to be worn all the time when on deck.

The regulations allow the use of inflatable lifejackets which meet specified requirements as well as the conventional non-inflatable type. I understand that such inflatable lifejackets have only recently been developed but that they should become generally available soon. My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan has been helpful to hon. Members in demonstrating this type of lifejacket. Earlier this week must have been the only occasion—I am sure that it did not break the rules of the House—on which an hon. Member was seen in the Tea Room wearing a lifejacket, which was when my hon. Friend demonstrated it to me.

I can support the proposals that lifejackets for at least the number of persons on board should be carried on all fishing vessels. However, I have much more difficulty over a mandatory requirement for a lifejacket to be worn at all times when on deck and the requirement that the lifejacket must be of an inflatable type. In Committee and in consultation with the industry we must give careful consideration to whether an inflatable lifejacket might impose risks in connection with machinery, winding equipment, and so on, and to the problem of wear and tear. In short, it could impede work and lead to early deterioration and damage of the lifejacket. It would be impossible to enforce such a provision, and we shall have to carefully consider that point. It is a matter in which I am very much aware that an individual should act on the advice of his skipper.

Clause 4 on wheelhouse visibility provides that fishing vessels should be constructed so as to afford a clear view ahead and, in particular, that there should be an unobstructed view to the horizon from the wheelhouse. We shall need to consider in Committee whether that provision is necessary. There are regulations concerning construction of vessels over 12m. I refer the House to rule 5 of the collision regulations requiring a proper lookout. Clearly a proper lookout cannot be provided if there is not visibility from the wheelhouse in the way that my hon. Friend requires in clause 4. We must consider whether there is any reason why existing regulations are not proving effective.

Mr. Fairbairn: Why should the horizon be taken as the concept of visibility? One can envisage many occasions at sea when one might be able to see the horizon, but not the danger which is closer or, alternatively, when one might not be able to see the horizon but one can see the dangers.

Mr. Mitchell: That is an interesting point. I can see that there is much opportunity to examine these matters in Committee.

Clause 5 provides that the statutory rules for calculating loadlines for merchant ships should be applied, with appropriate modification, to fishing vessels as well. Again, I have to say that this provision will need careful consideration in Committee to ascertain whether it is necessary or practicable. The statutory rules, with one exception, already apply to fishing vessels. The actual marking of loadlines has not been required because such vessels load at sea and the loadline cannot be observed from on board. That view is endorsed by the International Maritime Organisation and incorporated in the international convention for the safety of fishing vessels 1977.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North made certain suggestions, which should be carefully considered. The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) referred to vessels returning to port overloaded. The Department has a rogues' gallery of photographs and newspaper cuttings which people have proudly obtained and, in some cases, treasured showing vessels coming into harbour weighed down to the gunwales with fish, in effect saying, "What a marvellous people we are. What a great harvest of the sea. Never has a vessel come into harbour so loaded with fish." Our surveyors are horrified. That point must be considered carefully, and I welcome the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North.

There are complications and difficulties about examining the loadline of a vessel which is pitching and tossing, but we must consider all possible alternatives for dealing with the problem of the overloaded vessel, which my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan correctly identified.

[Mr. Mitchell]

Clause 6 relates to the requirement for vessels of less than 12m in length to carry a bouyant heaving line attached to a lifebuoy, to carry six distress signals of a specified type and to carry 10 per cent. more lifejackets than the number of persons on board. The first and second of those requirements are already provided for in existing regulations.

I accept that there should be a requirement for the carriage of lifejackets for all persons on board fishing vessels below 12m in length. I have questioned the proposal that all lifejackets should be inflatable. However, I am pleased to consider, in consultation with the industry, a safety margin in the number of lifejackets carried.

Clause 7 would make it an offence to leave debris at sea that may damage fishing vessels and their gear. It would enable the owner of a fishing vessel damaged in that way to claim compensation from the owner or master of the vessel that left the debris. The Government are not prepared to support that provision. Permitted operational discharges from ships are regulated by the international convention on marine pollution. The Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985 imposes licensing arrangements on the deposit of substances and articles within British fishery limits or by United Kingdom registered ships anywhere.

Mr. Fairbairn: Is there to be a distinction between territorial and international waters, because the law on compensation and reparation can be applied in territorial waters but not in international waters on the same basis?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. and learned Friend is a noted member of the legal profession. He has a detailed understanding of these matters which goes beyond my knowledge. By the time we are in Committee, I shall have full cognisance of the matter that he mentioned.

Clause 8 provides that all persons aged 50 or under who sail in fishing vessels shall, within six months, obtain a certificate which demonstrates that they have satisfactorily undertaken a sea training course which would include fire precautions. Voluntary training for that purpose is already widely available. Considerable effort has been made in recent years through the Sea Fisheries Training Council, now under the auspices of the Sea Fish Industry Authority, and the group training associations, to encourage all fishermen to attend training courses on basic sea survival. The House heard from the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about a sole survivor from a ship who survived as a result of his clothing. There are many lessons to be learnt from that.

My Department has inspected and approved 33 centres where those courses are conducted. In addition, the new certification requirements for skippers, second hands and engineers on fishing vessels of 16·5m or more in length provides for mandatory attendance at courses for basic sea survival. Through the fishing industry safety group, and in other ways, the Department is willing to continue to encourage as many other fishermen as possible to attend those courses. I do not believe, however, that such attendance should become mandatory for all fishermen, because of the problems of enforcement and because of the costs that it would impose on the fishing industry.

Clause 9 refers to reports to Parliament. It would require the Secretary of State to make, and lay before Parliament, reports on all aspects of safety at sea and to make proposals for improving existing regulations on the subject. I believe that provision to be unnecessary. The published annual return "Casualties to Vessels and Accidents to Men" provides statistical information covering both merchant ships and fishing vessels. The provision of additional information in the reports is being considered. For fishing vessels, the fishing industry safety group provides a widely representative medium for presenting reports of all kinds, including reporting of accidents.

The remaining clauses of the Bill relate to the mechanics of the administration of the provisions in the earlier clauses. Before I say a few words about these remaining provisions, it would be right to add that my Department will endeavour to identify provisions which are likely to be thought generally desirable and which, since they would be within the ambit of the long title of the Bill, could be introduced in Committee. I hope my hon. Friend will consider that so that we can make use of his good fortune in the ballot. I have in mind, in particular, a provision to amend section 28 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1970 so that skippers as well as seamen on fishing vessels commit an offence if they are drunk on duty. I think that this provision would meet with general support.

I have no comments on clauses 10 and 11. The fine of £2,000 prescribed in clause 12 is a matter on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department will need to be consulted. Statutory provisions on fines fall within scales of penalties.

I have no comment on clause 13. Clause 14 provides for money to be provided by Parliament for the purposes of the Bill. However, I am advised that a money resolution is not required in this case. Clause 15, on interpretation, will need redrafting in order to define accurately the categories of fishing vessels affected by the earlier provisions. Clause 16, as drafted, provides that the Bill shall come into force six months after its enactment. For the reasons that I have explained to the House, it will be prudent to amend this clause so that various parts of the Bill come into force on days appointed by the Secretary of State.

In conclusion, I again congratulate my hon. Friend on having brought forward a measure that will be of great value not only to his constituents, but to the fishing industry as a whole.

1.12 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I join in the warm congratulations to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on introducing the Bill, which is an important and welcome measure. I also congratulate him on his efforts to promote the Bill and on the exhibition held yesterday. However, I must tell him that he looked better in his jacket with the spray hood up than he did with it down.

At last a measure is being introduced for the fishing industry, which has been sadly neglected both in this House and in the preoccupations of the Government. It is especially welcome that something is being done about a problem which has become a major scandal and which has been allowed to fester for a long time.

I shall try to be brief, because I also wish to support the Crown Immunity Bill, which is hovering in the wings. Indeed, I received the impression that the length of the Minister's speech was motivated, not by a passionate

desire to support this Bill, but by a desire to talk out the Crown Immunity Bill. However, that might be an unworthy and uncharitable thought.

Mr. David Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is quite right—it is both uncharitable and unworthy. I have long had a deep concern about fishery safety needs. That was why I went to the fishing industry safety group last year, and why I have paid such particular attention to the problems of and opportunities for our Coastguard service. I am sure that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will not wish to leave that point on the record.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: It was unworthy and uncharitable, but we have just delayed the Crown Immunity Bill a little longer.

I welcome the Bill that we are debating, but that does not mean that it is completely satisfactory. Much of what it proposes could be introduced by statutory instrument. It is unfortunate that such provision has not been made. The classic example of that was given by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan—the Plimsoll line, or McQuarrie line as its might be called. Several of us have pressed for a loadline for ages. The Government were committed to introducing one in 1979, but we still do not have it. That shows clearly how the real needs of fishing are neglected.

The importance of the Bill is that it collects various essential reforms. Assuming that I have the good fortune to serve on the Standing Committee, I shall try to strengthen the Bill and consult the industry widely. The Bill can operate only if it has the industry's consent and support. The industry's first reactions have been somewhat negative. It deserves much wider and much more elaborate consultation so that it can make representations which we can take into account in Committee. We must cope with the industry's objections and satisfy its needs. There are real problems from the Industry's point of view.

Something must be done, however. A fisherman is four times more likely to be killed at work than is a coal miner. The fishing industry has the worst death and accident record. The safety and accident record of other industries has improved, but that is not true for fishing. The reason might lie in the state of the industry.

The fishing industry in England has been hit harder than that in Scotland. It does not make an adequate return to invest in modernising vessels. Fishermen are therefore putting to sea in vessels which are smaller than the distant water ones which we used to have when we fished in Iceland, and many of them are old. Much of the Grimsby fleet has been fishing for 25 years and needs renewing, but the industry does not make capital to renew or update it, or to provide for safety, so fishermen are more at risk. Present financial conditions create the possibility—it is no more than that, but there have been rumours—of staged accidents and staged sinkings for the insurance return. That is a real danger when the industry is in financial difficulties, as the English industry is.

Until last year, when the church decided to cancel it, we had a harvest of the sea service in Grimsby at which the death roll was read out. We were read out our share of the 424 fishing boats which had gone down since 1975 and our share of the 245 deaths since 1976. It was a deeply moving ceremony, not least because each year's list was as long as the previous year's. The tragedy is that there has been no improvement.

I shall not go into detail, but I welcome the Bill's contribution to safety. There is a problem with fishing vessels that are hired by fishermen for pleasure. Are they covered? If not, can they be included in Committee? The Bill is restricted to fishing for profit. Much of the English industry is fishing, not for profit, but to keep going, but hired vessels are effectively being used for profit and there is a safety problem because there is an inadequate supervision framework. I hope that the Bill can be applied to them.

There is a case for providing Government finance to encourage safety. In European Community countries many improvements in the industry are financed by Governments without infringing EC rules on competition. If money can be made available for new nets and equipment, for example, in Denmark, surely we could provide money for safety improvements of the sort designated in the Bill. At least Sea Fish Industry Authority grants should be available for safety improvements, which are a financial burden on the industry. If vessels had to carry immersion suits, as I think they should do, that would place a considerable financial burden on the industry. Even these provisions impose a burden, which should be eased through Government grants. It is unreasonable and encourages a negative reaction from the industry to impose improvements without providing the necessary help.

For the most part, the hon. Gentleman's analogy with seat belt wearing is valid. There will be objections to wearing lifejackets, but wearing them will become a habit. Therefore, when the requirement is imposed it will be accepted as a necessary safety device. I hope that similar pressures will eventually be applied as that have been for the extension of seat belts to back seats by encouraging a demand for greater safety. In *Fishing News*, Fraserburgh skipper George Sutherland states:

> "Please leave us alone to settle our own problems. Everybody is going to be steamrollered into this by a person who started on the subject only two months ago"—

that is incorrect—

> "yet is now supposedly going to set the whole world to rights. We are very conscious the whole time of the safety aspect when we are at sea."

The answer to that is the bad safety record of the industry, which shows the need for this measure . I hope that the measure will turn that negative reaction into a greater desire for safety.

The industry is reacting in the way that it is doing because it has been badly treated. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, which is centred in Grimsby, has strong reservations, and echoes the views of Scottish fishermen. That reaction is coming both from organisations and from individual share fishermen. They feel that they have been maltreated, ignored and neglected for years. Therefore, they are resentful when new burdens are imposed on them without any of the reforms and changes which they wish being conceded. It is the paranoid reaction of people who have been persecuted The industry has been tragically neglected and its way of life has cut it off from the wider community.

The share fishermen in Grimsby come to me with genuine problems. The fishing season has been extended because of the desperate need to catch fish up to the quota. Fishermen are working later and longer in the year. They are often saddled with debt, yet supplementary benefit, which used to be paid to them in those circumstances, is no longer available. Since 1980 they have had to be classified on the same basis as self-employed people to be eligible for benefit. Although they pay a special stamp

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

which recognises their special terms and conditions, the DHSS is not bound by the same rules as the Department of Employment, and they cannot get supplementary benefit for 15 days. That is one example of how fishermen are neglected and brutally treated, and explains why they develop the inevitable reaction of resentment at Government interference in their industry.

It is our responsibility to fight and argue for fishermen, and it is also our responsibility to say, when there is a real problem, as there is in safety, that the fishing industry has to play its part. While we shall consult it and make changes to represent its interest, it is in its interest to accept this legislation.

The Bill is right. It will save lives, protect vessels and reduce the risks to those who, while they do business in great waters, will always be in peril on the sea. I hope that we can regard it as part of a new and better deal for fishermen, so that they are no longer neglected, but are helped, encouraged and fought for, while their safety is protected by measures such as this Bill.

1.25 pm

Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on his Bill because, unlike some other measures, it was not promoted in a flash Harry television film that highlighted the problem but was something that my hon. Friend identified and is responsibly attempting to address.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) suggested that I was an inappropriate person to intervene as there are no fishing interests in my constituency. It would be unfortunate for the Scottish tourist industry and the fishing industry if the concept that there was no fishing interest there were to get about. However, I accept that I do not have a maritime fishing interest except in the Tay. Nevertheless, I have had the privilege of being a commissioner for the northern lighthouses for some years and therefore have seen at first hand the risks and dangers for fishermen, and the ferocity of the sea. I have also seen the bravery and courage of those who carry out their business in great waters.

In the course of my professional career, I have also represented the families of those who have suffered loss or injury in the fishing community. It is their astonishing courage and bravery that has perhaps given rise for the necessity for the Bill because, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, there is resistance to safety measures. The bravest men frequently say that they do not need a parachute because they can jump on their own. I particularly welcome the Bill because it gives to those whose courage is so great that it may on occasion become foolhardiness, a protection that they would never be sufficiently unproud to ask for themselves.

The Bill demonstrates the dilemma of legislation. I am against statute law, preferring the common law, because it is law of principle while the statute law is that of detail. The Bill illustrates the difficulty of such a choice because the moment that things are made simple they run into the difficulties of definition that simplicity creates. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan on bringing in a Bill which is comprehensible when it is read and also simple.

There are difficulties of definition in the Bill that caused me great anxiety and I do not want to go into them more than to illustrate that, for instance, in the concept of debris at sea, one is talking about innumerable manifestations of debris and results from it. There is a common penalty of a fine not exceeding £2,000. If the iceberg that sank the Titanic had fallen within the concept of "debris", it would clearly be an inappropriate penalty for the person who put the iceberg there to be fined only £2,000.

That illustrates the difficulty of trying to be simple. Nevertheless, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan on the simplicity of his measure. I hope that the Committee will bear in mind that the simpler the legislation, the more likely it is to be applied and the more likely it is to be obeyed.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North, who has left the Chamber, will remember the piracy case involving the Mary Rose and another vessel which left Aberdeen. If the evidence of sobriety at sea among the crew in that case is anything to go by, we must undertand that fishermen will obey legislation only if they believe it to be in their own interests. They will not necessarily obey legislation which actually is in their own interests.

Having made that comment upon human conduct, I assure the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that I welcome the belated sibling of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, the next measure to be debated, even more than he does. I have not spoken to frustrate the hon. Gentleman or his Bill. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan for introducing a measure that is simple, humane and thoroughly justified. It will benefit a courageous community.

1.32 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I do not think that I can follow the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Mr. Fairbairn) because I did not really know where it was going. It seemed to be without direction—the compass had gone astray.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) upon his determination and good sense in introducing the Bill. He is known — I think affectionately — in the north-east of Scotland as the Buchan bulldog. However, the tenacity he has shown in introducing the Bill is reminiscent more of a terrier than of a bulldog.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport, said that it is wonderful that this important measure has been introduced. If, however, the name of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan had not come high in the ballot for private Members' Bills, or if he had not decided to introduce his Safety at Sea Bill, I wonder how long we should have had to wait before the Government took it upon themselves to introduce such an important measure. All credit, therefore, must be given to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan.

There are four fishing ports in my constituency: Dunure, Maidens, Girvan and Ballantrae. Sadly, they are not operating as fishing ports because of various problems. I am dealing with some of the problems that are being experienced at Maidens. I hope that in the near future it will, once again, become a fishing port. Girvan needs to be dredged so that it can be restored to carry out its proper

function as a fishing port. We hope that the area will soon be restored to an active fishing area so that my constituents no longer have to use Ayr and other harbours.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, I represent a large number of fishermen. That is why it is important, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and the Minister of State said, for the views of fishermen to be taken into account when the Bill is considered in Committee.

I spoke to Willie Hay yesterday. I believe that people like him have some important things to say. I sent a copy of the Bill with a letter to fishermen's leaders in my constituency, who are members of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, asking for their views. I hope that other hon. Members will take the opportunity to consult their representatives and to feed back their ideas. I hope also that some account will be given to them. That does not mean that we should do everything that the fishermen ask, because Parliament must make up its own mind. However, I am glad that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan mentioned consultation.

I am sorry that some hazards are missing from the Bill. Debris is not the only hazard of oil operations and rigs. Oil operations create other hazards. The increasing extent of oil operation now foreshadowed in the Clyde could create problems for Clyde fishermen. The supply of rigs, fuel spillage and several other matters can create problems. I hope that there is an opportunity in Committee to consider those factors.

The second area of hazard is submarine operations. There have been one or two instances of pretty near misses between fishing vessels and United Kingdom and American submarines. It is difficult to designate and rigidly adhere to special areas. I know that there are security problems about informing fishing vessels or the Coastguard of the movement of submarines, but, from the fishermen's point of view, some understanding would be helpful, so that the likelihood of potential clashes could be minimised.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan mentioned the sinking of the Mhairi L, and the Minister made some helpful comments. I wish to discuss the lessons to be learnt from the sinking of the Mhairi L. On 5 March 1985 I asked the Minister about the number of fishing vessels and other boats that had disappeared in unexplained circumstances. There was one in 1980, two in 1982, two in 1983 and another in 1984. I was worried about the loss of the Mhairi L, but, more importantly, the relatives of those who were lost were worried about the facts that the Mhairi L went missing in unexplained circumstances.

Much pressure was put on the Department of Transport to ensure that the result of the Mhairi L inquiry would not be another "cause unknown". A great effort was made to carry out a full inquiry and to use the resources of the Royal Navy. The huge resources of the Royal Navy should be mobilised in those circumstances.

I pay credit to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), from whose constituency the men came, who raised the matter. He was supported by many people and by the media. We discovered the cause of the sinking of the Mhairi L. I have a copy of the report that was eventually presented to the Minister. The Minister made the report available only to the relatives, interested parties, the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale and myself. I pressed the Minister to publish the report, but he said that such reports were normally confidential to the Department and were sent only to interested parties. I cannot understand why. The report contains several recommendations and suggestions that are vital to the fishing industry. The report should have been published and recommendations should have resulted from it.

I wish to mention briefly the three main points that arise from the report. The first is that 40 hours elapsed between the last radio contact with the Mhairi L and the Coastguard being alerted. We heard earlier about the importance of alerting the Coastguard as soon as any anxiety is felt. It was suggested that the boat may have discovered a large shoal of fish and did not want anyone else to know about it. Safety is much more important than that. The Department should set out some procedure which ensures that the Coastguard is alerted after a specified period. There should not be a 40-hour period before the Coastguard is alerted.

The second point is that it was clear that, in an attempt to free the trawl, which had fouled the cable, the combined weight of the men on the deck caused the capsizing which led to the vessel sinking. The report clearly states:

"Compensation is payable for gear lost: if fouled gear cannot readily be freed it should. . . be slipped and buoyed and a report made to the Fishery Officer."

That should be made clear to fishermen repeatedly so that people do not sacrifice their lives trying to save something that can be replaced.

Mr. David Mitchell *indicated assent.*

Mr. Foulkes: Their lives are much more important, as the Minister seems to agree, than the recovery of fishing gear.

Thirdly—and this is why it was vital that the report should have been published—the report stated that the life rafts on the Mhairi L had no hydrostatic or automatic release units, so they could not inflate and float free. Although merchant shipping notice M1173 recommends that such units be fitted, there is no mandatory requirement. The Bill would make it mandatory, and that is the main reason why I think it is an excellent Bill. It can never be proved absolutely, but there is a strong likelihood that, if the Bill had been law before the Mhairi L sank, and if she had been fitted with life rafts with automatic release, those men would be alive today.

The Minister has already replied to the debate, and I do not ask him to intervene again. Recently, he provided me with a written answer saying that the Government intend to take some action. I hope that during the later stages of the Bill, the Minister will clearly say what will happen to the recommendations arising from the report on the loss of the Mhairi L. I hope that future inquiries carried out by the Department of Transport to discover the causes of boats sinking will use all the resources available, including Royal Navy resources, without the need for pressure for those resources to be used. I hope that future reports will be published so that we may know any recommendations that arise from them and whether those recommendations should be or are being followed up.

It is vital for the fishing industry to learn the lessons of each loss. If that is a result of the sinking of the Mhairi L, the sad loss of those brave men's lives may not have been completely in vain.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any way in which the House can register its deep disgust at the fact that the Minister spoke for 46 minutes on a Back-Bench Members' day?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. I cannot determine the length of speeches.

1.38 pm

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): In the interests of brevity, which would appear to be desirable, I shall not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) not only on the objects of the Bill, which are admirable, but on the way in which he presented the Bill to the House today. His commitment to the fishing industry is well known in Scotland and much appreciated among fishermen.

I say that by way of preamble, because I did not sponsor the Bill and I have reservations about it. I would not trust many people with a blank cheque, but I would trust my hon. Friend. However, I would not trust him with a blank Bill. It is for that reason that I did not seek to become a sponsor of the Bill. I understand the Scottish Fishermen's Federation feeling slightly aggrieved at not having been consulted about the Bill. My hon. Friend explained in opening why that had to be. I now understand why it was and I hope that the federation will now understand that it was impracticable to consult everyone in the time available before bringing the Bill before the House.

We warmly welcome the fact that my hon. Friend has dealt with some of the preliminary objections that have been raised. I apologise to my hon. Friend and to the Opposition Front Bench for missing their speeches. I have explained the reasons to them. My hon. Friend has given reassurance on many points. Most important, he has already not just consulted but looked at the equipment that he wishes to be required and used on fishing vessels. Indeed, he enabled demonstrations of the kit to be given to other people. I would have hoped that we might have a demonstration in the House today.

I also welcome my hon. Friend's commitment to consultation not only with the fishing industry but with other relevant interests—not least with the coastguards, as he agreed in his opening speech, as they have particular responsibility for co-ordinating search and rescue activities and have gathered a great deal of information about the problems which arise on crisis occasions. I shall certainly consider the Bill, and especially the speeches made today, with fishermen in the East Neuk o' Fife. At this stage, I comment on just two points.

I have doubts about the practicality of clause 4(3) which provides that

"the place from which navigation is controlled"

must have

"an unobstructed view of the horizon"

in

"all conditions in which the vessel is designed to operate."

With a vessel bouncing up and down fore and aft in gale conditions, I wonder whether it is feasible to build a wheelhouse which is not 50 ft. above the deck but from which the horizon can be seen in all conditions. Practical considerations of that kind will have to be considered in relation to various aspects of the Bill.

I am also most uncertain about the provisions of clause 5 in relation to load lines, not from the safety angle but because of the practical problems of implementing load line certificates. I have been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister about the salvage vessel for which it cost an amount in the low thousands of pounds to obtain a load line certificate. It turned out in the end not to have been necessary, but that is by the way—a matter of the Department, in my view, nitpicking and going for safety for the surveyor rather than for the ships at sea.

Those two points illustrate my anxieties about the Bill. I share the objectives that my hon. Friend is pursuing and I appreciate the way in which he intends to pursue the further progress of the Bill. I hope that it will ultimately become a first class Bill and will receive the assent of the whole House. Finally, I advise my hon. Friend to keep it as short and as simple as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Crown Immunity Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.49 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Hereford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The whole House will be aware of the intent behind the Bill, which is to amend the law in respect of Crown immunity for National Health Service premises. In one sense, we have secured a great triumph in that the Government moved very rapidly yesterday to meet the substance and provisions of the Bill. It is also appropriate for me to say that this opportunity to move the Second Reading of the Bill is due to the generosity of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) in making way for my Bill, thus enabling us to gather here to consider the Crown Immunity Bill.

I must pay tribute to other colleagues and sponsors who have worked hard to persuade what has turned out to be a most sympathetic Government in this respect.

This is an all-party matter, and I must refer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) whose work on many social issues over a number of years, especially in the defence of those most at risk, such as hospital patients, has been an inspiration and example to all of us.

I refer also to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who has been anxious over the provision of Crown immunity for hospitals. I have a common interest in a hospital that concerns him directly in Stafford. His hard work to protect patients and his constituents has provided an important thrust for the Bill.

I have not met an organisation or group of individuals outside the House that has offered any opposition to the Bill. I do not want to take too much time on this issue, but the Institute of Environmental Health Officers, especially Clive Wadey, has done a tremendous amount of work in tackling Crown immunity for hospitals. The unions have been diligent in leading a campaign in the same direction. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities, district authorities and other organisations have all been pursuing the aims of the Bill for a long time. All the sponsors and all those who have worked to secure that which the Bill seeks all feel a sense of triumph and of real appreciation to the Government. The Government have completed their own review and are acceding in full measure to our arguments that are directed to National Health Service hospitals.

It was a surprise to many people when they found that the food hygiene regulations did not really apply to Crown premises, such as NHS hospitals. Hospital patients often have to tolerate substandard food hygiene. As the Department of Health and Social Security's guidance on food hygiene observes, they are especially at risk. Catering in hospitals is recognised as being more complex than in other catering areas and the consequences of food poisoning for hospital patients are likely to be more serious than they would be for healthy people. It is clearly not right for the catering area with the highest risk consequences to be exempt from food hygiene laws.

A survey of food poisoning, published by the Central Public Health Laboratory, identified hospitals as the third highest source of food poisoning outbreaks in the public sector. That is a shocking revelation. The Institute of Environmental Health Officers' survey in 1976-77 found that 60 per cent. of the 1,627 hospitals visited had food handling areas that were below the standards of the food hygiene laws and that 8 per cent. of hospitals visited would have been prosecuted but for Crown immunity. A smaller follow up survey of the worst premises in 1978 found that 45 hospitals that would have been prosecuted but for Crown immunity were still in the prosecutable category.

The most recent report of the Institute of Environmental Health Officers of 1985 suggests that 60 per cent. of NHS hospital kitchens currently break food health regulations and that 97 hospitals would be liable for prosecution but for Crown immunity. We all aware of some of the details and consequences of that. There have been 211 outbreaks of food poisoning in hospitals over the past six years affecting nearly 4,000 people, of whom, tragically, 279 have died.

Since 1981 there has been a four-fold increase in cases of bacterial food poisoning. I would at this stage mention the Government's position. However, we are fortunate in having the presence of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health in the Chamber, and I have no doubt that he will do so. I wish to save time and to give an opportunity to the many hon. Members on both sides of the House who, I know, want to participate in the debate. Therefore, I shall omit that section of my speech.

Undoubtedly, the tragic events at the Stanley Road hospital in Wakefield, where 19 people died and where over half the patients were affected, have focused the growing concern of the general public on the standards of NHS hospital kitchens.

The report of the inquiry catalogues appalling breaches of hygiene regulations and mismanagement, and the description of the kitchen and kitchen practices in paragraph 180 and subsequent paragraphs is a profound indictment on hospital management. I am sure that that report should be mandatory reading for all hospital management teams. It is shocking to think that, even with that background, some hospital authorities have continued in much the same way.

Such an instance was given to me by Mr. Dick Carson, the director of environmental health for Edinburgh, who is an acquaintance of many hon. Members. In February 1985 a full survey of Liberton hospital kitchen was carried out and a report was sent to the authorities. In April 1985 —let us remember this in the context of Stanley Royd where there had been deaths—a second visit was made, during which it was found that virtually all the major recommendations contained in the report had not been actioned.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): I, too, know of the communication from Mr. Carson. When the hon. Gentleman had discussions with the Ministers on this, did they say whether Scotland would be included in the Bill?

Mr. Shepherd: It will be appreciated that, as an English Member of Parliament, I do not always respond swiftly to the Scottish dimension, but, undoubtedly, the removal of Crown immunity should apply to all sections of the United Kingdom, and that includes Northern Ireland.

After the April 1985 visit, nothing happened until December 1985 — three months ago — when a major outbreak of food poisoning occurred during Christmas week. The cause was attributed to a turkey meal, and 160 patients and staff were affected. Fifty extra nurses had to be drafted in.

[Mr. Shepherd]

In December, as a result of the outbreak, a third visit was paid to the hospital, during which it was found that no action had been taken on the major recommendations of the report. That shows the shocking inertia of management. There were totally unacceptable practices, such as suspect oven temperature controls and turkeys defrosting in sinks and cooling on work surfaces that had previously been used for food preparation.

Mr. Carson has said that, as a result of the second visit, when it was discovered that the major recommendations of the report prepared in February 1985 had not been implemented, but for Crown immunity he would have felt obliged to report the hospital to the procurator fiscal's office for possible prosecution.

I am sorry to say, too, that even in my area lack of diligence in certain important areas continues. Last Friday I made a quick inspection of one of our hospitals, although not the one that was being visited by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and there I saw raw meat adjacent to cooked chickens. That would seem to show that, not withstanding a report published a few days before, my district health management was unaware of the urgency of responding to this.

Paragraph 177 of the report on Stanley Royd says:

"It is well known that the most common source of infection is raw meat and poultry and that contamination is most likely to result from a failure to separate cooked and uncooked foods."

I have met senior officials within the administration who seem uncertain of such a basic regulation. What chance have our patients and many of our communities when there is a lack of diligence in such an important area?

The fundamental need for bringing about the removal of Crown immunity is the recognition that there is less self-regulation in hospitals and lack of mandatory force is the essential element. Laws that are applicable and should be enforced are absent. I am delighted that the Government will now introduce this measure before Easter so that it can be enacted in this Session of Parliament.

Crown immunity presently encourages diffusion of managerial responsibility, removes incentives to act and does not provide sanctions for breaches of present food laws. Therefore, against that background I gladly welcome the Government's response to the pressure from all of us and their willingness to move in and to act swiftly. This is a triumph for common sense.

1.59 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I thank the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for taking on my Bill and congratulate him on his impressive handling of it. I hope that I do not embarrass him by saying that, if he is not on the Government Front Bench before we kick the Conservatives out in a year or two, I shall be very surprised.

I warmly welcome the Government's decision. When we took a deputation to the Minister for Health, he did not commit himself, but said he would listen and respond. he has listened, and I greatly appreciate the way in which he responded.

I should like to echo what the hon. Member said about the organisations involved. I do not propose to repeat them, although I should like to thank Clive Wadey and John Edmonds of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, the Royal College of Nursing, the British Pest Control Association, the National Association of Health Authorities and the Association of Metopolitan Authorities, which played a major role in the campaign.

The Government must recognise that, if they are to abolish Crown immunity, extra cash will be required. Many improvements will come from good management, proper supervision and properly trained staff, but Government cannot will the end if they cannot provide the means. It does not make sense to rule out extra cash for the health authorities. The Government have always said that NHS hospitals should not hide behind Crown immunity and that they should maintain food regulation standards. The Government, therefore, have an obligation to provide the cash now that Crown immunity is to be abolished.

Although there is no provision in the Bill for Government buildings, other than hospitals, I intend to press the Government to lift Crown immunity in places such as nurses' homes, many of which are in a shocking condition, defence establishments, such as naval dockyards, and prisons. Crown immunity regarding food regulations should be removed from all premises where it now operates. Prisons are especially important, because prisoners' conditions are not inspected. It is right that people should be imprisoned for crimes, but it is wrong for them to suffer food poisoning in addition to serving their sentences

I shall seek to extend the Bill. I want Crown immunity to be removed from all health and safety legislation because it entails double standards of health and safety for some workers. Crown notices are a poor substitute. They are issued infrequently—13 times less often than non-Crown notices—and lack powers of legal enforcement. I give notice that I shall press for future action to be taken.

This warmly welcomed Government decision signals the end of Dickensian hospital kitchens. It will help to sweep away health hazards and thus vastly increase the safety of hospital patients.

2.4 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I first thought of introducing the Bill, but I was extremely happy to hand it to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for two reasons. The first was that I thought it would be in extremely safe hands and that he would run it ably, as, indeed, he has. I endorse everything that the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) said about my hon. Friend. I hope that my hon. Friend will be duly noted in the appropriate place.

It is outrageous that hospitals should have the Dickensian conditions that the right hon. Member has described in their catering facilities, which, mercifully, have been prevented in every other sphere of public life outside Crown buildings.

I am a member of several London clubs, but not the one that was prosecuted for having food which fell below safety standards. I recall one club, which I shall not name, in which some years ago a friend of mine and I were dining. We were there after the staff had retired. We went to the kitchen to obtain some food and there we found about 20 cockroaches. We presented them to the chef with a small compliments slip. The club subsequently entirely renovated its kitchen. It is disgraceful that such conditions have been and still are prevalent in our National Health Service hospitals.

A television programme recently showed similar conditions in a hospital kitchen. Cockroaches were shown to be still running around. I welcome the steps that my hon. Friend is taking to ensure that such an outrage is prevented in the future.

I welcome the fact that the Government are prepared to take over the Bill. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health will shortly announce that the legislation will be introduced in this Session of Parliament. I warmly welcome the Bill and the Government's successor Bill.

2.6 pm

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): I congratulate the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on the way that he comprehensively set out the provisions that he would like to have introduced. He gave the House an impressive array of facts. He seems to have influenced the Government to take action even before he did that.

There is no need for me to repeat the catalogue of events that led to the Bill's introduction. It is a tragic commentary on our medical advances that we should have a slogan such as "Hospitals can damage your health."

It is an indictment of the system that Crown immunity protects management that is incompetent and does not care rather than that which is criminally incompetent. The system puts the elderly and the infirm at risk.

Environmental health officers have no legal right to enter such establishments or even to lay down what regulations or code of conduct should be obeyed. Fortunately, some caterers pay attention to a code of conduct. However, others do not. It is tragic that National Health Service hospitals should be the biggest offenders. Many hundreds of people have died unnecessarily in hospital. Only one hospital in seven has anyone trained in pest control awareness, despite all the publicity associated with inadequate pest control in hospitals over the past few years.

I have a constituency interest to declare. I have two hospitals in my constituency — Hairmyres and Philipshill. I mention them only to declare an interest, not to criticise them. I ask the Minister what I have already asked the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills: will he ensure that the proposals are extended to Scotland?

The Government should take on board the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley). Every Government establishment with Crown immunity should be examined. I have another constituency interest here, because the Inland Revenue department in East Kilbride employs hundreds of people, and the Overseas Development Agency and the National Engineering Laboratory are also situated in my constituency. In addition, of course, there are DHSS premises and places where food is prepared and cooked. There is a potential risk in those kitchens if adequate supervision is not implemented.

I would not exclude from such criticism the place in which we are gathered today. That is no criticism of the staff, or of those, including myself, who are trying to help in this respect. A blind eye is turned to too many things. However, as we say in Scotland, I shall let that flea stick to the wall.

All I ask is that the Government proceed with the Bill with all haste, that it should apply to Scotland and that the Government take on board the possibility of extending the provisions to other premises currently enjoying Crown immunity.

2.11 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on introducing the Bill. I also congratulate my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Health for accepting the principles of the Bill, which recognise the need to accept that the king can do no wrong, but only most of the time.

The highest standards are needed for patients in hospitals. Yesterday the Secretary of State said that the nature of the problems displayed by the Stanley Royd hospital report is such that Crown immunity should be removed so that prosecutions under the criminal law can be taken against the Crown. They can already be taken against private hospitals.

The problem arises not only in connection with food in NHS hospitals, but in other areas and in other public buildings. My constituency found that to its cost when 37 people died at the Stafford general district hospital during the recent legionnaire's disease outbreak.

When the result of the inquiry is known, I ask my right hon. Friend to bear in mind that, as long ago as 1977, the Health and Safety Commission recommended that the Government should remove Crown immunity by legislation, especially as it means that only the Crown is immune from prosecution, not Crown servants. Currently the Crown can claim immunity from prosecution for Government Departments, the Armed Forces, the NHS, the Medical Research Council, and so on, although not for nationalised bodies. I ask that the principle that has been won in this case, and for which the Government deserve the greatest possible credit, should be extended to all those premises. I hope that the Bill will cover these when the report on the legionnaire's disease outbreak in my constituency is published, so that the principle of the removal of Crown immunity will apply to them all.

2.13 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I welcome the Bill on behalf of the Opposition. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on his generously brief introduction which has allowed several other hon. Members to speak.

I congratulate also those who, for many years, have campaigned on this issue. I think especially of those working within the NHS and the Institute of Environmental Health Officers, who have had a long campaign to try to ensure that we match the care and attention that we give to other parts of the hospitals by giving decent care and attention to the kitchens. It has always been absurd that we should spend tens of millions of ponds on building decent hospitals, then proceed to poison some of the patients by not looking after the kitchens.

I do not think that when the Bill is enacted, people will expect many prosecutions of health authorities or their staff. The object of the change is not to get people into court or gaol, but to change the relationship between environmental health officers and people who work in hospitals. Hitherto, whatever the environmental health people have said, they have not had the authority to force their views on those responsible for the kitchens. That is

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

the vital difference. In future it will not be a matter of a departmental circular saying, "You will have to assess the priorities when deciding what to do about the kitchens." We shall provide a statutory priority to keep kitchens up to the mark.

We hope that that will be an end to scandals such as those at Stanley Royd, or the Charing Cross hospital in Fulham or the Royal Free hospital, which used to be in my constituency. We look forward to the cockroach-free hospital as well. We had the appearance of a famous cockroach in the chicken stew there, and some benighted chap in the health authority tried to tell everyone that it was OK provided that the cockroach had been well cooked. I do not think that anybody found that convincing. We would rather get rid of the cockroaches.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) said, the change cannot be made on the cheap. One estimate for doing the Stanley Royd hospital's kitchen was £600,000. There were various other, lower, estimates. I hope that we shall decide that bringing kitchens up to the mark is a statutory priority in the next few months, but the Government will have to find the money to do it. We are talking in terms of tens of thousands on some kitchens, and hundreds of thousands on others. I must emphasise that it is not always the old hospitals that have bad kitchens. The Royal Free hospital kitchen is a shambles, and the hospital has been open for only a little more than a decade.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): The Royal Free hospital is in my constituency, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The problem is that, for a long time, we have had to rely on the good sense of hospital authorities to follow the advice that has been given. It is clear that some have not accepted that advice, so there is a clear need for legislation. I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dobson: I hope the hon. Gentleman will also agree that his health authority would probably like the Government to provide the extra £150,000 or £200,000 which it says is necessary to do up the kitchen rather than have to take it from some other aspects of health spending. Some hon. Members have played a prominent part in the campaign, but even those who have played the smallest part owe it to health authorities to back up our request with a request for money to make good what we are asking them to do. I hope that we shall all be consistent on that.

2.17 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): I, too, pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for the manner in which he introduced the Bill. I congratulate him on his success in getting such a speedy response from the Government, and I congratulate the Government on responding so rapidly.

I was pessimistic when I was first alerted to the problems about the speed with which the change could be introduced. I therefore discussed with constituents who have experience of the Health Service and of environmental health problems and who have drawn the matter to my attention, what could be done in our area to act as if Crown immunity had been removed. I took up their recommendations with the regional health authority and with the North West Hertfordshire health authority.

They recommended, first, that it was essential to establish clearly at each level of the authority who is responsible for ensuring that the problems are properly tackled. That happens automatically in the private sector because of the threat of legal action. Secondly, they recommended that environmental health officers should have immediate access to NHS premises, without any need to give prior notice and, thirdly, that expense should not be used as an objection to fulfilling obvious obligations under the law.

I took that up with my regional health authority, and I am happy to say that all three steps have been implemented in our area, which may explain why we have not had the problems that other areas have faced in recent years. There are some exceptions to that, but they are not in my area.

My constituents have also started a study of the catering facilities of every NHS establishment in the area, and that example should be followed more widely. One question will remain after today's debate: why has it taken 40 years of the NHS for the laws which apply to private hospitals and establishments to be applied to the NHS? Have we been so bemused by the myth that mere national ownership removes the commonsense necessity of applying to those who work within the services the normal incentives, disciplines and sanctions that are required to make us all fulfil our obligations and ensure that our services are of the highest standard in other areas? I congratulate the Government on introducing this sanction and incentive for people who provide those services.

2.20 pm

Mr. Mark Hughes (City of Durham): I join in the congratulations of the House on the skilful way in which the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has managed the matter. I wish to introduce a constituency problem.

I have two large prisons in my constituency. In Frankland prison, 80 people are serving life imprisonment. If there were an outbreak of salmonella it would affect prisoners and wardens alike, yet there are only 20 beds in the hospital wing. My constituents are considerably disturbed by the thought of category A prisoners being transferred from prison to receive adequate medical care as a result of kitchens not being subject to inspection.

My one regret in the Government's written answer yesterday is that their intention appears to be exclusive to the National Health Service. In many other areas the risk to the public is no less severe. Prisoners in Her Majesty's prisons are as much the concern of the Government as are elderly people in psychiatric hospitals. I deplore the withdrawal of protection from prisoners which the food and drug Acts and Crown immunity should give them.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the rule of Crown immunity would place workplace equal with workplace, and hygiene regulations equal with hygiene regulations, in every sector of society, and that that is how it should be?

Mr. Hughes: Of course. We welcome what the Minister is doing for NHS hospitals, but please could the Government bear in mind that the risks facing hospitals also apply to the Palace of Westminster and prisons?

2.22 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): I am the ninth Member of Parliament to speak in this short

debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for the brevity of his speech, and add my warm congratulations to him and his co-sponsors on both sides of the House, and to the many organisations and individuals who have been urging the course which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services yesterday announced that the Government would pursue.

All those concerned have focused public attention on food hygiene in the Health Service. It is immensely important that hospital kitchens maintain high standards. The tragic outbreak at Stanley Royd Hospital in August 1984, which resulted in the deaths of 19 patients, illustrated that only too well. The results of poor standards in hospital kitchens can be horrifying.

As I have made clear on many occasions, the Government have been most concerned at the allegations of poor standards that have been made in recent months. For example, the survey by the Institute of Environmental Health Officers, published last autumn, found that 60 per cent. of 1,000 hospital kitchens that had been inspected were in some way in breach of the food hygiene regulations and that 10 per cent. of those, just under 100, were so bad in the view of the survey that they warranted prosecution.

These examples were worrying, and, as the House will recall, I immediately called for urgent action by the health authorities concerned to take priority remedial action wherever that was needed. I also made it clear to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), who led an all-party deputation which represented a wide range of interests to see me last autumn, that I was undertaking a review of Crown immunity of hospital kitchens. That was under way, and it was that review, set in hand last year, that led to the Government's statement of intention by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday.

My right hon. Friend made it clear that in responding to the problem of poor hygiene there can be no substitute for more effective management and supervision in hospital kitchens generally. As the debate is concentrating on affairs that go wrong, it would be right for me to pay tribute to the majority of staff in NHS hospitals who carry out their duties responsibly and very properly. It would be wrong if the message went out from the House that the difficulties to which the legislation and debate are drawing attention were spread over the entire Health Service.

Because effective management and supervision are the essence of solving the problems, the introduction of general managers, who will be both responsible and accountable for these and other matters, will do much to secure the right parity of managerial responsibility. The Government have concluded that, in addition to the essential tasks of improving managements and supervision, further action is appropriate. We have concluded that stronger safeguards are needed to underpin management efforts, and above all to protect patients.

Therefore, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear the Government's intention to introduce legislation in the present Session to remove Crown immunity from hospital catering in respect of the food hygiene regulations by making health authorities subject to the provisions of the Food Act. We shall propose that the Food Act 1984 and the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970 should apply fully to health authorities.

We have been asked about Scotland. For Scotland, similar amendments will be proposed by the Bill to the Food and Drugs (Scotland) Act 1956. This will mean that local authority environmental health officers will have rights of access to all hospital premises where food is stored, prepared and consumed. In the past, the officers have been encouraged to go in, but this change of law will give them the right of access to all hospital premises. They will be able to require improvements, and, if need be, they will be able to prosecute and seek closure of kitchens if circumstances are bad enough to justify that.

These changes address themselves directly to the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills and of other right hon. and hon. Members. The Government consider that it is right, for an important issue such as this, to introduce a Government Bill. I know that it is the Government's absolute and firm intention to introduce the legislation before Easter. It is better to deal with the matter by means of a Government Bill and to buttress that action with the action that was made crystal clear in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement about the Stanley Royd affair. We must take action, which is in hand, to strengthen the guidance to the National Health Service on measures to ensure high food hygiene standards. Nobody must be left under the illusion that merely by dealing with Crown immunity hospital kitchens are made hygienic. The guidance that is necessary——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 14 February.

Private Members' Bills

CONSUMER SAFETY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

CRIMINAL RECORDS BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question —[17 January]—That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House *—[Sir William Clark.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Committee what day?

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Now, Sir.

Hon. Members: Object.

Sir William Clark: Friday 28 February.

LAW REFORM (PARENT AND CHILD) (SCOTLAND) BILL

As amended, considered.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

TOBACCO SMOKING (PUBLIC PLACES) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 February.

PROTECTION OF MILITARY REMAINS BILL

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Normans Riding Hospital, Gateshead

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.*—[Mr. Sainsbury].*

2.33 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): First, may I thank the Minister for Health for the fair and interesting hearing that the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) gave to the deputation from Gateshead that came to discuss the closure of the Normans Riding hospital. The Under-Secretary of State took on board several points. Unfortunately, he did not take on board all the points of concern. The Minister for Health wrote to me on 22 January informing me that the hospital was to close. He said that he had concluded

"that the interests of patients were best served by allowing the proposed closure to proceed. I am satisfied that by closing the hospital, significant financial savings will be achieved with no reduction in the services provided."

That is the point on which I take issue.

In September 1985 the National Health Service health advisory service and the DHSS social services inspectorate reported on services for the elderly provided by the Gateshead health authority and the social services department of the borough of Gateshead. The report raises several problems and difficulties that do not confirm the Minister's view that he kindly set out in his letter to me. Although not directly related to the closure, but related to the cause of the closure, paragraph 5 states:

"Despite the fact that Gateshead is a deprived District the Regional Health Authority's budgetary distribution does not, in the short term, improve the situation in that the 1985-86 allocation leaves the District even further from target."

Gateshead spends only 92 per cent. of what, even by the Government's standards, should be spent on health. Gateshead was specifically mentioned in the Black report. We have severe problems of social deprivation and unemployment and the general difficulties of an area without major teaching hospitals. However, my constituency has a further problem, because it has a large number of former coal miners who worked in one of the dustiest coalfields in Britain. Consequently, the number of those with bronchial and other complaints associated with working with coal is markedly higher than it is in other areas. The fact that we have only 92 per cent. of the resources that we should have can only exacerbate the problems, because people are not getting the health care that they require.

Normans Riding hospital is largely a geriatric hospital. There are 10 general practitioner beds that deliberately have never been used as such. In the report, the general practitioners' view on the provision of geriatric services is as follows:

"All but one of the general practioners met expressed concern about difficulties in achieving admission to hospital of elderly people with sub-acute illness compounded by sociological and psychological overtones that precluded continued care at home. In such cases, a domiciliary consultation was virtually a pre-condition of direct admission to a geriatric bed and then usually via a waiting list."

It is still via a waiting list.

The community health councils view of the proposed closure of Normans Riding hospital is,

"that there was considerable under-provision for the elderly in Gateshead with a fear that the needs upon which the Health Authority plans were based did not match the needs in the community: there was deep concern about the closure of Normans Riding hospital."

That is true. Those needs do not match the needs in the community.

The decision of the district health authority is based on an assumption about the local authority provision, especially part III provision, that can be made. I have consulted the leader of Gateshead authority, the chairman of social work and the deputy chairman of social work. Their problem is that if the local authority increased expenditure to provide the part III provision that is needed to alleviate the problem, although it would not solve it completely, the local authority would inevitably incur penalty under the rate support grant scheme. The DHSS has not taken sufficiently into account the restraints which the Department of the Environment has placed on that local authority.

If we are to do something effective about care for the elderly in Gateshead, the two Departments must come together, and one of them—presumably the Department of the Environment—must admit that the allocation of rate support grant to Gateshead and the grant-related expenditure assessment for social work in Gateshead will have to be increased to meet what the district health authority expects the local authority to provide, because it clearly cannot be provided now.

The Minister's officials also stated:

"The hospital service relies heavily on the practice of 'swapping' to gain admission to Part III beds. The present allocation system, with no health service input, reinforces this practice which medical have used to gain what they see as a fair proportion of beds for their patients. Between 4 January and 17 May 1985, 35 beds were allocated to the hospitals . . . of which 20 were 'swapped' with existing hospital patients."

It is clear from cases that I have taken up in my constituency that, even in semi-acute cases, people cannot obtain geriatric beds unless something else is seriously wrong with them or unless arrangements can be made with the local authority.

The report continues:

"The Health Authority have proposals for the closure of the Normans Riding Hospital. In this situation it is inappropriate to dwell on the structural problems observed. However, the toilets and sluices on most wards are most unsatisfactory for elderly patients."

They are, but it would be fairly inexpensive to bring those toilets and sluices up to standard. What is more, it would be a fairly inexpensive job to sort out the structural problems in Normans Riding hospital, because they are not fundamental problems, but problems of construction begun at a time when people were working in a hurry because a war was about to break out. There would not appear to be too great a difficulty. The advice given by the Minister's officials is:

"If patients are to be accommodated at the Normans Riding Hospital for any length of time, it is imperative that"

the sluices be brought up to date.

The suggestion is that those patients should be transferred to Dunston Hill hospital, which is also in my constituency and which I visited on Monday. I have every regard for the dedication and skill of the people who work an that hospital and for what they are trying to do in difficult conditions, but the advice of the Minister's officials is this:

"The Health Authority should not transfer patients from Whinney House, Normans Riding and St. Mary's Hospitals to Dunston Hill Hospital until accommodation of a satisfactory standard is available for each group of patients. Application to the Regional Health Authority for special funding to ensure this work is carried out should be considered."

Within the last month, the northern group of Labour Members met the chairman of the regional health authority. Although helpful, he could not give the kind of commitment that we want. It will cost £400,000 to bring the wards at Dunston Hill to the standards suggested. If Normans Riding is left in place that expenditure will not be needed.

Two aspects of this annoy me particularly. First, the decision to close Normans Riding was taken on the casting vote of the chairman of the district health authority who is appointed and paid by the Minister. Secondly, I believe that we need both Normans Riding and the upgraded Dunston Hill to meet the needs of our elderly. The assumptions being made about the ability of the local authority to cope appropriately with the problems faced by elderly people in my constituency and in the rest of Gateshead will not be fulfilled unless that provision is made.

The decision to close Normans Riding was a mistake. It is an excellent hospital with special expertise nationally in the care of the terminally ill. I am very upset indeed that the Minister has decided to close that hospital on the casting vote of his paid chairman and against the wishes of the community and the GPs when all the evidence shows that insufficient provision has been made and when it is perfectly clear that £400,000 will have to be spent to provide an alternative.

Finally, Normans Riding is the only purpose-built isolation hospital on Tyneside. It is not connected to the main sewerage system, it has its own kitchens, and so on. I should not like to think of a situation arising in which we would need those isolation facilties, but if we get rid of Normans Riding we shall never again have a facility which —God help us—may at some time be needed. The alternative—the Queen Elizabeth hospital—is in the most densely populated part of the borough and is clearly not appropriate for the provision of isolation facilities in an emergency.

2.47 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): As I would expect, the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) has deployed his case with both care and concern on behalf of his constituents in raising again the decison to close Normans Riding hospital. I have listened with great interest to all that he has said and I will certainly write to him if there are points which, on reflection, I think deserve a further response from me other than that which I can givein this brief debate. I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments about my ministerial colleague the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) with regard to the way in which the deputation led by the Member for Blaydon was received and the manner in which the matter was dealt with.

To set the closure of Normans Riding in its proper context, I should perhaps begin by referring to the important developments taking place at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Gateshead. As the hon. Gentleman knows, schemes 1 and 2 of that hospital were commissioned in 1967 and 1972 respectively. Those two schemes provide a full range of radiological diagnostic support services, out-patients' department and so on, to support the 263 acute and maternity beds. As the hon. Gentleman also knows, scheme 3, built at a cost of some £9 million, will add a further 200 acute beds, six operating

[Mr. Barney Hayhoe]

theatre suites, six intensive therapy unit beds and further supporting services. Scheme 3 is due to come into use in the next few months and various groups of patients will be transferred to the new facilities. One result will be that facilities at Dunston Hill hospital will become vacant. Patients currently at Normans Riding hospital will be transferred to the vacant facilities at Dunston Hill.

In addition to scheme 3 of the Queen Elizabeth hospital, there are other exciting developments taking place in Gateshead. For example, there is the recently opened community unit for those with mental handicap. There are priority service developments for the elderly who are severely mentally ill.

The hon. Gentleman referred to beds for the elderly and the general provision in his area, and I understand that with the completion of the schemes to which I have referred a number of beds for the elderly will become available. If further beds for the elderly are required, these could be provided at Bensham or at Dunston in a rather more economic fashion than would be achieved by retaining the facilities at Normans Riding.

Mr. McWilliam: Does the right hon. Gentleman have any idea of the distance or the transport difficulties that are involved in getting from Ryton, Blaydon or Winlaton to Bensham or Dunston?

Mr. Hayhoe: I would not claim any knowledge that meets even remotely that which the hon. Gentleman has of the area which he represents. I intended to say something about transport facilities but, as he will understand, I must rely upon advice that I am given.

Within the general area there is increased provision for patients flowing from the increased resources that have been provided for the NHS. That does not mean—I accept what the hon. Gentleman says on this score—that there is not real pressure on the available resources. As he has said, the district is achieving only 92 per cent. of its target under the RAWP arrangements, though it is moving up steadily as a result of the overall policies that are being implemented. I hope that 100 per cent. of the RAWP target will be achieved over the course of the next decade. This means that health authorities must examine carefully the way in which services are organised to ensure that they are provided in a sensible and efficient manner. If money is tied up in a hospital which is not required, other developments cannot take place.

It was against that background, and with the desire to concentrate services for the elderly at the Dunston Hill hospital site, that the Gateshead health authority considered carefully the need to retain the Normans Riding hospital.

The hon. Gentleman will know much better than I do that the Normans Riding hospital is sited in a relatively remote part of the district away from any real back-up medical facilities. I have read past correspondence and I have found that much has been made of the pleasasnt site of the hospital. I accept fully that that is so. At the same time, I cannot ignore the high cost of upgrading—estimated at £500,000—that would be required if the hospital were to be retained. The relative isolation of the hospital causes difficulties for patients and staff alike. I am advised that the only public transport to the site is the twice-weekly special bus service that is laid on to coincide with visiting times. On other days, relatives without their own transport must use taxis or make other special arrangements.

Mr. McWilliam: The hospital is within three quarters of a mile of one bus terminus, from which there is at least one bus an hour. It is within 500 yd of a bus stop at which buses stop less frequently but fairly regularly.

Mr. Hayhoe: I do not think that that detracts from what I have said. The hon. Gentleman has put the matter in a local context, which local people will know.

Patients who require investigative treatment must usually be taken by ambulance to the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Gateshead. Day-to-day medical cover at the Normans Riding hospital is provided by local GPs. Any condition requiring a specialist opinion currently requires a special trip by the consultant.

That overall situation will be greatly eased when the patients are transferred to Dunston Hill hospital where patients and staff will have easier access to important diagnostic and other services. The medical aspects of these matters must loom large in all the attention which is given to them.

I understand that Dunston Hill hospital is served by about 10 bus services, making visiting by most relatives and friends much easier. It is important not to expect old folk to have to walk, perhaps in inclement weather such as that that we have experienced recently, and there is a great advantage in having the public transport going close to the hospital.

Inevitably, much has also been made of what is seen as the loss of a good hospital. I fully appreciate the local anxieties and loyalties that are always amplified when an issue of this kind comes before the public's attention, but perhaps those aspects have been somewhat exaggerated. In practice, only a quarter of the patients currently at the Normans Riding hospital come from the immediate area and the move to Dunston Hill hospital will bring the majority of patients nearer to their homes and families. That is my advice, and I presume that people have looked carefully at where the families and friends of the current patients of Normans Riding live.

Mr. McWilliam: I do not want to take up much more of the Minister's time because he has been more than fair to me in giving way, but patients from the immediate area of Normans Riding hospital are being transferred miles across the borough deliberately and patients from miles across the borough are being transferred into Normans Riding hospital to prove the point. It is being done deliberately.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am not in a position to confirm or deny that. I have not examined the records myself. As I say, I am advised that the position is as I have given it to the House today.

Two of the four wards at Dunston Hill hospital which will be used for existing patients from Normans Riding have already been upgraded. There has been talk of the standard of accommodation. Plans are in hand to upgrade the other two wards. I should stress that that upgrading is for real; I have seen some suggestions that it is merely a cosmetic operation.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have seen for himself on his visit to Dunston Hill hospital earlier this week, to which he referred, the efforts that the authority

is making to provide attractive, homely surroundings for the patients. The two wards yet to be upgraded will be upgraded to a high standard and over the next few years attention will be given to landscaping the hospital site and to a number of other significant improvements to parts of the site.

It has been suggested that the developing expertise in the care of terminally ill patients at Normans Riding hospital will be lost as a result of the move. The hon. Gentleman referred to that aspect. The Gateshead health authority is aware of that concern and will be seeking to ensure that that expertise will continue when patients transfer to Dunston Hill hospital. As the hon. Gentleman may know, all the permanent staff at Normans Riding hospital are being offered similar appointments at Dunston Hill hospital. It is hoped that a majority will be able to transfer with their patients, thus providing a high measure of continuity of care.

The hon. Member referred to the health advisory service report which was broadly welcomed by the Gateshead health authority because it contained many helpful recommendations. The authority established a small group of members to look at its specific points. One can quote from a report a sentence or paragraph or two to sustain one position or another. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will therefore appreciate it if I quote one paragraph to buttress my case, just as I would expect him equally fairly to quote another paragraph that was more in tune with his point. Paragraph 100 states:

"The policy of integrating geriatric medicine with general medicine on the Queen Elizabeth site following scheme 3 and concentrating facilities for the elderly on fewer sites is commendable and should secure the medical care of the elderly in the mainstream of clinical medicine. This will give all patients, irrespective of age, immediate access to the diagnostic and therapeutic resources of the district general hospital which will improve morale and recruitment of staff to the speciality of geriatrics and last, but by no means least, create the means of introducing the multidisciplinary patient-oriented approach to illness at all ages into the acute sector wards."

There is a real bonus in medical terms to be gained from the proposition which I have agreed. Revenue savings will be achieved by closing Normans Riding hospital and transferring the services to Dunston Hill hospital. The savings are estimated at £178,000 in a full year, all from non-direct patient care services — administration, domestic, catering, portering and estate managing services. Those savings are to be deployed elsewhere to improve services to patients.

I have accepted the assurance from Gateshead health authority that the transfer of the facilities from Normans Riding hospital to Dunston Hill hospital will enable the authority to provide the same level of service more efficiently and will release much needed money to improve existing services across the district to the overall benefit of the community who look to the authority for health care.

For these reasons, and after careful consideration, I concluded that I should support the decision of the Northern regional health authority and the Gateshead district health authority by approving the closure of the hospital. Although I have listened with great care and interest to the hon. Member for Blaydon, I am not persuaded by what he said that the closure decision I made was wrong.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That leave be given to the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill to sit with two Members on and after Tuesday 11th February.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETERHEAD HARBOURS (SOUTH BAY DEVELOPMENT) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration read.

To be considered upon Wednesday 12 February at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Labour Statistics (Ogmore)

1. **Mr. Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons, male and female, are unemployed in Ogmore; how many are long-term unemployed and under 21 years of age; and how the figure compares to the other areas of Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): On 9 January 1986 there were 4,084 male and 1,238 female claimants unemployed in the Ogmore constituency. Data on age of claimants and duration of unemployment are available only until October 1985, when there were 158 males and 78 females under 20 years of age who had been unemployed for over 12 months. I will, with permission, circulate the comparative information requested in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Powell: Does the Secretary of State share the views of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) that his Government and his party must switch to caring Conservatism and caring capitalism? Is he not aware of the total degradation and frustration that unemployment creates in our schools, homes and throughout society? Is he not concerned that the attitudes of desperation are leading to the escalation of violence and crime in the Principality in particular? Is he not concerned about the young who are now taking to drugs? Is it not time that he joined his colleagues in protesting——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a very long question.

Mr. Powell: —for a change in attitudes or a change in leadership?

Mr. Edwards: I am greatly concerned by the current levels of unemployment. I do not think that it needs a switch or a change of attitude, because that concern is clearly shared by all Ministers and members of the Government. If the hon. Gentleman refers to changes in attitude, I welcome the substantial changes in attitudes and performance which have happened generally throughout industry. However, I think that it is necessary for those in employment to recognise that pay increases for those in work create unemployment.

Sir Raymond Gower: Is not the description by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) of violence in Wales a gross misrepresentation of the real position and a distortion of the conditions which obtain?

Mr. Edwards: I think that perhaps the most important thing in the future of job creation in Wales is the high reputation which has been gained here and abroad by firms in respect of the attitude and performance of the Welsh work force and those who live in Wales. They have an image, not of violence and hostility, but of a work force which will co-operate to the full to make a success of companies. That is where the future lies.

Mr. Ron Davies: Given that in Wales there is little realistic prospect of young people obtaining any sort of work and that they have to rely almost entirely on the youth training scheme, what is the Secretary of State's response to the recent decision of the Mid-Glamorgan area manpower board to refuse to sanction any further youth training schemes in 1986-87?

Mr. Edwards: It is not true that there is no prospect for young people in Wales. It happens that I have been round two major companies in Wales which are taking on labour at the present time, with an average age of 18½. Two of the other companies which I have recently been round in south Wales have an average age of under 27. The truth is that many young people are obtaining employment. I am concerned that agreement has not yet been reached in Mid-Glamorgan about proposals put forward by the Manpower Services Commission. I believe that these problems can and will be overcome. I note with satisfaction that other providers of training have said that they would provide and take up the training places if necessary. I hope that in the reality that will not prove necessary.

Sir Anthony Meyer: As the Labour party has now as good as admitted that there is nothing that it can do about unemployment in the short term, is it not clear that the best and quickest alleviation of the problem lies in further expansion of the community programme? Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to press for the removal of the remaining obstacles in the way of an expansion of that programme?

Mr. Edwards: I agree with my hon. Friend that the community programme is very important for the long-term unemployed. At the end of December last year there were over 12,000 filled places in Wales, and the aim is to expand that total to 20,500 by June.

Mr. Foot: In view of the answer that the Secretary of State gave about training, does he not think it absurd and intolerable that the Government should be insisting, through the Manpower Services Commission, that extra funds should be made available by local authorities, particularly in the areas that are hardest hit, to keep the

training schemes going? Why does the right hon. Gentleman not come out boldly and say that the Government should pay for that? Has he cleared up the confusion of his colleague, because the Employment Minister said only a couple of weeks ago that no burden would be put on the local authorities? Why should we have to bear that burden in Wales?

Mr. Edwards: I take it not very well when the right hon. Gentleman, of all people, lectures this Government on youth training, while his Government totally failed to make provision for proper youth training, and this Government have launched the largest programme of youth training ever undertaken in this country and are now extending the YTS from one to two years. I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman left us such a monstrous backlog to catch up.

Mr. Wigley: Despite the youth training jobs and the other jobs that have been brought on stream, does the Secretary of State not recognise that, with unemployment more than doubled since his Government came to office in 1979, the time has come for there to be a change of policy? How much worse does the situation have to get before we have that change of policy?

Mr. Edwards: I notice that the hon. Gentleman does not tell us what the policy is that will produce growth without inflation, although I hope that he will at least welcome the fact that we are in the fifth year of growth, that inflation continues to fall, that we have the fastest growing economy in Europe, that manufacturing investment has grown steadily since 1983, and that a large number of firms in Wales are undertaking massive investment and massive expansion and are taking on people, as I have discovered when visiting several of them in the past few weeks.

Mr. Best: Is it not a fact that the measures that the Government have introduced — the community programme, the enterprise allowance scheme, the job start scheme, and all the other measures to help the long-term unemployed — are the envy of any Socialist Government, and are far more imaginative than anything put forward by the Opposition when they were in government? Will my right hon. Friend remind the House of how many jobs have been created in this country compared with other European countries, and of the percentage of those employed in this country compared with other countries in the EEC?

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to all those matters. The fact is that the scheme would not have been the envy of the Labour Government, because they failed to take the necessary measures which have been introduced by this Government against a most difficult background.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will the Secretary of State confirm that regional aid to Wales has fallen by 40 per cent. since 1979 and is due to fall further until 1990? With such massive unemployment, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), is not the trend towards social disintegration? Is it not time that the right hon. Gentleman realised that Wales has been at the receiving end, not of caring capitalism, but of naked, aggressive and irresponsible capitalism?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman talks about regional policy. It is effective in relative terms, and Wales is very well placed, as is borne out by the fact that over about three years we have obtained about 20 per cent. of all inward investment to this country, and in 1985 we obtained 48 overseas projects—over double the 1983 figure. Only last week we secured for Wales one of the best high technology research British-based companies. Renishaw Research Ltd. is opening a new factory in Gwent, and more than 500 people will be taken on by this world-leading firm.

Following is the information:

Constituency	*Males*	*Females*
Alyn and Deeside	78	67
Clwyd North West	92	73
Clwyd South West	101	58
Delyn	76	61
Wrexham	137	82
Carmarthen	63	52
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	58	56
Llanelli	77	79
Pembroke	107	124
Blaenau Gwent	155	77
Islwyn	93	33
Monmouth	67	49
Newport East	152	95
Newport West	134	95
Torfaen	93	83
Caernarfon	64	33
Conwy	63	31
Meironnydd Nant Conwy	30	17
Ynys Mon	80	69
Bridgend	77	53
Caerphilly	179	69
Cynon Valley	158	70
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	254	147
Ogmore	158	78
Pontypridd	179	81
Rhondda	237	112
Brecon and Radnor	35	31
Montgomery	28	20
Cardiff Central	167	85
Cardiff North	57	34
Cardiff South and Penarth	141	83
Cardiff West	153	112
Vale of Glamorgan	85	65
Aberavon	110	86
Gower	81	49
Neath	70	92
Swansea East	172	127
Swansea West	223	127
Wales Totals	4,284	2,755

Note: The bandings of the analysis of the age of claimants and duration of unemployment are such that data in respect of those aged under 21 years cannot be extracted. The figures are for claimants aged under 20 who have been unemployed for over 52 weeks.

Mr. Speaker: I have allowed a long run on this first question. We must now get on. I ask the House for shorter supplementary questions.

Hospital Waiting Lists

2. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had regarding hospital waiting lists; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): From time to time I receive representations about waiting lists, usually based on individual cases. There are many different reasons why waiting lists develop in individual specialties. Health authorities have been asked to examine their lists and my

Department is currently arranging a workshop with their representatives to consider the problems identified and the development of possible solutions.

Dr. Marek: I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will not sail in the same direction as the Secretary of State, who is on his way out with the Prime Minister. Will he take a refreshing, long look at the extraordinary waiting list in the Principality? In Wales, 130,000 people are waiting to get into hospital, and more than 10,000 have been waiting for in-patient treatment for more than a year. Let us have some truth and honesty for once from the Government. Will the Minister advise me? On Friday I talked to a constituent in Clwyd who is suffering from hair loss because of a disease of the scalp. She has been told that she cannot see a consultant for three months. What is the Minister's advice to my constituent?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Member suggests that I do not give comparative figures, but sometimes it is a good idea. The rate of increase of in-patient waiting lists has remained roughly consistent with that of the previous Labour Government. The rate of increase in terms of out-patients has fallen by 5 per cent. under the Government. With regard to the hon. Gentleman's constituent, if he will write to me with the details I shall have the case considered.

Mr. Raffan: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate Clwyd health authority on its productivity record, especially on halving the eye treatment waiting list during the past year? Will he acknowledge that Clwyd's financial allocation for 1986-87 is not as generous as it might at first appear, because 2·5 per cent. of the 5·5 per cent. increase is needed to meet the cost of pay awards not fully funded last year, leaving only 3 per cent. to cover growth of services, advances in technology and other urgently required improvements in the services?

Mr. Robinson: I know that Clwyd is currently conducting a study of its waiting lists. I welcome its action. With regard to resources in this year's allocation to Clwyd, the conditions in which they were announced were the same for Clwyd as for every health authority in Wales. I should point out that since 1979 resources for Clwyd have increased, taking into account those allocations, by just over 32 per cent.

Mr. John: As Pontypridd district hospital is responsible for 8,000 out-patient treatments per year, and as that hospital is scheduled for closure, what sense is there in adding those to the existing lists in Mid-Glamorgan? Must the population of Mid-Glamorgan now look for admission to one of the hon. Gentleman's famous workshops?

Mr. Robinson: The decision about what services to provide in Mid-Glamorgan is one for that health authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Does my hon. Friend accept that the improvements in the National Health Service under this Government, and the improved treatment, when not such good treatment, or even no treatment, was possible before, have encouraged longer waiting lists? What are the waiting times for those on the waiting list?

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend has made a well thought out and valid point. In terms of throughput, in-patient treatment has increased by 18 per cent. Under the Labour Government it increased by only 6 per cent. Out-patient treatment has increased by 12 per cent. Under the previous Labour Government it fell by 3·5 per cent.

Rate Support Grant

3. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from local authorities in Wales concerning the rate support grant settlement for 1986-87; and how many of these expressed dissatisfaction with the settlement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have received letters from four local authorities, and five hon. Members have written expressing concern on behalf of their local authorities.

Mr. Wigley: As the eight counties in Wales have had to increase their rates by between 11 and 28 per cent. to make up for the loss in real terms of rate support grant from the Welsh Office, does the Secretary of State agree that the blame for the rate increases that will hit the people of Wales later this year must be laid fairly and squarely at the door of the Welsh Office?

Mr. Edwards: No, I do not agree. Provision is up, above the expected rate of inflation, and the settlement is extremely generous in relation to the settlement in England and the past performance of Welsh local government. I can see no possible justification for some of the very large rate increases that have been proposed by counties in Wales. I believe that they will be damaging, not only to those who have to pay the bills, but to employment prospects, about which people have been expressing concern.

Sir Raymond Gower: What circumstances explain the difference in the rates proposed by Welsh counties this year and those imposed last year, apart from the fact that there were local government elections last year?

Mr. Edwards: In the case of South Glamorgan, my hon. Friend may have a point. I understand that the county council spent about £3·5 million of balances last year and has decided not to spend them this year. I believe that the county council should justify the proposed rate increase to its ratepayers and local people. I do not believe that any proper justification has been given for it.

Mr. Barry Jones: I urge the right hon. Gentleman to cease his attacks on the Welsh county councils. No one wants higher rates, but I remind the Secretary of State that the counties are facing demands on their services that are a consequence of cuts and high unemployment. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that Gwynedd county council has a first-rate case, because Holyhead town has a male unemployment rate of about 27 per cent.?

The county of Clwyd faces a loss of £2 million because of technical changes in the rate support grant assessment. I remind the right hon. Gentleman again that 25,000 people in Clwyd are seeking work. The Secretary of State's financial policies in local government are virtually in ruins. He should acknowledge the difficulties of the counties at a time of high unemployment.

Mr. Edwards: In my view, none of that justifies, for example, South Glamorgan proposing an increase in precept of six times the forecast rate of inflation. The hon. Gentleman refers to Gwynedd, where expenditure per head is the highest in Wales, block grant per head is higher than the Welsh county average, and grant-related expenditure per head is the highest in Wales. That does not make a particularly good case for the hardships of Gwynedd.

I know that Clwyd has difficulties, but it is a high-spending authority which has increased the numbers in its

employment while other counties have found it possible to reduce the numbers that they employ and, therefore, reduce their costs. Perhaps the county council might have a go at that.

Mr. Harvey: Although many Conservative Members have reservations about the rate support grant for Clwyd, we find the proposed 15·7 per cent. rate increase totally unacceptable. Will my right hon. Friend condemn it?

Mr. Edwards: I hope that local ratepayers and employers, in particlar, will make clear to the county council what the consequences will be if it proceeds with its rate proposal.

Labour Statistics

4. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales by how much unemployment has increased in Clwyd and in Wales since 1979, expressed as a total and as a percentage.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 9 January 1986 there were 25,786 unemployed claimants in Clwyd. A comparable claimant-based figure for January 1979 is not available. For Wales as a whole, for the same dates, the seasonally adjusted claimant-based figures were 176,500 and 75,100 respectively, an increase of 135 per cent.

Mr. Jones: Those figures invalidate the remarks of the Secretary of State in answer to a previous question. When will this waste of human resources in Wales end? When can measurable numbers of our people look to work that will get rid of the distressing dole queues?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the labour market report by the Manpower Services Commission stated that three quarters of all job losses in Wales were in the manufacturing sector? The deindustrialisation of Wales under this Government continues apace. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that we are losing blue chip companies such as Courtaulds, Metal Box, Lucas, BP, and we now are losing the Milk Marketing Board? We ask the right hon. Gentleman to ensure in Cabinet a change of economic policy, to help the people of Wales get more work.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman must remember that during the lifetime of this Government the number of people eligible to work has increased by about 35,000. An increasing number of people are coming on to the labour market.

This Government have had to deal with what I believe may be the final stage of the decline of the old basic industries in Wales—a process that has been taking place for many generations. We must build on the substantial number of new companies that we have succeeded in attracting to Wales during the past few years.

Only last Friday I visited a factory in Clwyd—Ega Limited—which is undergoing massive investment, has taken on 100 people during the past 12 months and is absolutely confident that its expanison will continue. It is the sort of company that offers prospects for young people, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Geraint Howells: The right hon. Gentleman has held the high office of Secretary of State for Wales for almost seven years, during which time there has been the highest ever unemployment percentage in Cardigan. As nothing was done during those years to alleviate the problem, what advice will he give today to the unemployed young people in that area?

Mr. Edwards: To say that nothing has been done is to deny the facts. The hon. Gentleman knows well of the considerable efforts, some of them very successful, of Mid-Wales Development. He also knows of the measures taken in his constituency. I think, for example, of Aberystwyth, where there have been new projects and where a number of new factory units have been built.

The hon. Gentleman knows well of the considerable efforts in mid-Wales—for example, the grant scheme—to create new jobs in rural areas. To say that nothing is being done is simply untrue, as he knows.

Mr. Grist: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has recently been going around Wales making promises which, if allied to the remainder of the Opposition's policies, would set off a rate of inflation that would undermine any hope of investment in this country—the very investment that is the hope for the future?

Mr. Edwards: Yes, I have noted that, and the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has been doing that at a time when his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has been pointing to the castasrophic dangers of inflation again being let loose and suggesting that it was time that the Opposition worked out a policy to deal with that priority.

5. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; what were the equivalent figures in May 1979; and what was the percentage increase in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 9 January 1986 unemployed claimants totalled 13,300 in the Newport travel-to-work area and 30,718 in Gwent. Comparable claimant-based figures for May 1979 are not available. For Wales as a whole, for the same dates, the seasonally adjusted claimant-based figures were 176,500 and 74,200 respectively, an increase of 137·9 per cent.

Mr. Hughes: Do not those outrageous figures reveal the complete collapse of the crackpot economic strategy with which the Secretary of State has been so closely associated? What guarantee can he give the House today that the figures will not shortly reach 200,000? If he cannot give that guarantee, when they reach that level will he resign?

Mr. Edwards: The figures are rather more representative of the position that we found at the Llanwern steelworks in the hon. Gentleman's constituency when we came into government. It was grossly overmanned, inefficient and had no prospects for any future. It has now become one of the most efficient and competitive steel plants in the world and is actually taking on labour.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: I do not want to accuse the Secretary of State of being an economic illiterate, but does he not accept that Opposition Members have asked macroeconomic questions, while he has taken us on a microeconomic tour of some of the plants in Wales with which he has been involved during the past couple of months? That is not the answer that we need. We need a strategic answer, and he is not giving one.

Mr. Edwards: If the hon. Gentleman, of all people, having studied the history of Wales, does not understand that the decline of old basic industries and the attraction into Wales of new industries that will form a foundation for the future is the key economic issue confronting the Principality, I can only say that I am astonished and that he jolly well ought to know.

Mr. Harvey: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the insensitive way in which the Muntz Plastics factory in my constituency is laying off 130 workers? Will he guarantee to provide the support necessary to ease those lay-offs?

Mr. Edwards: The commercial decision must be taken by the company, but my hon. Friend knows that the Government have provided massive assistance to Clwyd to help deal with redundancies there, especially during the past 12 months. The Government have made a substantial allocation of urban aid, and we shall continue to provide that part of nort-east Wales with support at the highest level. Such assistance makes that part of the country especially successful in attracting new industry and investment.

Mr. Rogers: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that circumstances in Wales are disastrous and that the inward investment of which he speaks is not on a sufficient scale to solve the deep problems of Wales? Will he ask the National Coal Board to stop importing foreign coal which is destroying our mining industry? If the right hon. Gentleman really wants to do something about jobs, why does he not protect our fragile industrial structure rather than destroy it by his weak-kneed and pathetic subservience to the Prime Minister?

Mr. Edwards: The National Coal Board has imported coal for two reasons. It has imported special coals, which are not readily available in Britain, and coal required by the British Steel Corporation, which has to survive in an internationally competitive market. The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the BSC should operate with one hand tied behind its back to help his miners.

Council House Sales

6. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Wales since May 1979.

23. **Sir Raymond Gower** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many council dwellings have been sold to tenants *(a)* in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan council, *(b)* in the county of South Glamorgan and *(c)* in Wales since May 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Between May 1979 and the end of last year 2,057 council dwellings were sold in the Vale of Glamorgan and 5,963 in South Glamorgan out of the estimated total of 46,000 sales in the whole of Wales. Taking sales by Cwmbran development corporation, Mid Wales Development and housing associations into account, under this Administration over 50,000 public sector tenants in Wales have now bought their homes.

Mr. Knox: How does the number of sales in the whole of Wales compare with the number of right-to-buy applications in Wales?

Mr. Robinson: Ninety per cent. of live applications have been processed.

Sir Raymond Gower: As the existing legislation varies the terms under which people can buy and resell, does my hon. Friend think it desirable that they should be publicised by his Department?

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We propose, in the Housing and Planning Bill, to increase the discounts for flats to a maximum of 70 per cent. and to introduce measures to provide further protection for buyers of flats against unexpectedly high service charges. We also propose to reduce from five to three years the period during which discount would be repayable. That applies to flats and houses. We shall consider a publicity campaign when that Bill becomes law.

Mr. Roy Hughes: How many houses in Wales are unfit for human habitation? How many lack one or more of the basic amenities? Why has the money from the sale of council houses not been given to local authorities so that they can build houses for those who have to live in deplorable conditions?

Mr. Robinson: The Government have spent £275 million on private sector renovation, compared with the Labour Government's £57 million, and £205 million on public sector renovation, compared with the Labour Government's £86 million.

Mr. Best: Is it not a fact that the Government have given a dignity to council tenants which the Labour party has consistently denied them? The Government have enabled council tenants to buy council houses, which was consistently denied them by the Labour party; the Government have given council tenants a tenant's charter which enables them to do things with their council houses and to take in lodgers, which the Labour party has denied them; and the Government have introduced the right to repair as from 1 January 1986, which gives council tenants the opportunity to repair their homes, which the Labour party has again consistently denied them.

Mr. Robinson: I entirely agree with all of my hon. Friend's points. I only hope that that dignity will not be taken from council tenants by the Labour party if its policy document on the future of council house sales is put into effect.

Perinatal Mortality

7. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary for Wales what was the perinatal mortality rate in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* West Glamorgan in (i) 1979 and (ii) for the most recent available date.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The perinatal mortality rate for Wales was 15·6 per thousand total births in 1979, and the corresponding rate for West Glamorgan was 18 per thousand total births. By 1984, the latest year for which this information is available, the rates had fallen to 10·5 and 9·2 respectively.

Mr. Wardell: Will the Minister assure the House that a comprehensive service for the newly born in Wales will be instituted, including a paediatric cardiologist, a paediatric cardiac surgeon and a paediatric surgeon so that babies born in Wales are given the same first-class service as babies born in England?

Mr. Robinson: Those matters must be considered by individual health authorities in terms of the priorities that

they determine. However, the Government have had considerable success in reducing the perinatal mortality rate, which is part of the success of our perinatal mortality initiative.

Mr. Terlezki: Will my hon. Friend tell the House whether there have been any improvements in the maternity service in Wales?

Mr. Robinson: There has been considerable improvement in the maternity service in Wales in recent years, and the figures that I have quoted bear that out.

Welsh Water Authority

8. **Mr. Rowlands** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Welsh water authority regarding the privatisation of its services; and if he will make a statement.

12. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the Welsh water authority; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I spoke to the chairman of the Welsh water authority about water privatisation only last week. Both my hon. Friend and I regularly discuss the authority's affairs with the chairman. I have nothing to add to the statement that I made last week.

Mr. Rowlands: Does the Secretary of State not realise how deeply offensive it is to the overwhelming majority of Welsh people to introduce the concept of profiteering into such a basic supply as water to householders? Does he accept that privatisation is supposed to be a part of competition, but that there will be no such competition regarding the water supply? Does he agree that he has no mandate to introduce this system before the general election?

Mr. Edwards: Many people in Wales will wish to participate and own shares in the company. It is not true that there is no room for competition. There certainly is room for greatly improved services and efficiency, and that is to the benefit of all water users in Wales.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Secretary of State will no doubt recall that on Wednesday he told us that the chairman of the Welsh water authority was in favour of privatisation, and that I told him that I had spoken to the chief executive who told me that he could see no value in privatisation for consumers or employees. Will he tell the House who is speaking for the Welsh water authority? Is it the chairman, whom he appointed, or the chief executive, who is speaking for both the authority and the majority of people in Wales?

Mr. Edwards: The chief executive of the Welsh water authority has written to me about the statement that the hon. Lady quoted. In his letter to me he states:

"I am very sorry that confusion was caused but I would like to set the record straight and make it clear that I said nothing of the sort to Mrs. Clwyd."

He concludes:

"I hope you do not mind my writing to you to set out the facts but I do feel particularly aggrieved when words attributed to me in the House were a complete fabrication."

Mr. Raffan: Will my right hon. Friend remind the Opposition that 25 per cent. of the water in Britain is already supplied by private sector water companies efficiently and without complaint? Will he hammer home the fact that privatisation will free the Welsh water authority from financial constraints, allow it to borrow money more cheaply and thus accelerate its capital programme?

Mr. Edwards: I agree with every word that my hon. Friend has uttered.

Mr. Livsey: What will happen to tenanted farms, forestry and land if the Welsh water authority is privatised? Will farmers be able to buy their own farms from the authority?

Mr. Edwards: The position will be exactly as it is now. The water authority will retain such land as it thinks necessary for its operations. Those whom the hon. Gentleman mentions will benefit from a more efficient authority which can provide a better service.

Heart Disease

9. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure, in the latest year for which figures are available, by his Department on measures to reduce the incidence of heart disease in Wales.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Welsh heart programme is receiving very substantial support from the Government. The Health Education Council has pledged £1·5 million over a period of five years. In addition, when I visited Heartbeat Wales on Friday, I announced that the Welsh Office was adding £30,000 to the £100,000 already granted in this financial year and, subject to the usual processes of parliamentary approval, £200,000 in the next.

Mr. Thomas: I welcome the Minister's announcement of his visit to Heartbeat Wales last Friday. All who are concerned about the level of heart disease in Wales support the programme. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the amount of expenditure on advertising by cigarette manufacturers in Wales during the period of this campaign is something that we must all condemn? Will the Government take action directly against the cigarette manufacturers over this issue?

Mr. Robinson: The Government are reviewing the existing voluntary arrangements with the tobacco industry. I should not wish to speculate on the outcome of these discussions, but I am sure that the views of the medical profession will be taken into consideration. I share the hon. Gentleman's support for the work of Heartbeat Wales.

Dr. Roger Thomas: Cannot complex congenital heart disease be treated at Morriston and Cardiff instead of patients having to go to Bristol, Hammersmith and Birmingham?

Mr. Robinson: The services that a hospital provides are a matter for the health authority to consider. At the same time, we have centrally-funded services, which we review from time to time.

Mr. Grist: Is my hon. Friend aware of the alarming increase in smoking among schoolchildren? If we are to get on top of heart disease, is it not essential to get on top of the problem of child smokers?

Mr. Robinson: I am aware of my hon. Friend's point. This problem is particularly disturbing and prevalent

among young girls. We are taking steps to increase our public relations profile within schools to try to alleviate the problem.

Mid-Glamorgan Area Health Authority (Funding)

10. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the level of funding to Mid-Glamorgan area health authority.

Mr. Mark Robinson: My right hon. Friend has received a number of written representations from residents of Mid-Glamorgan. We have also recently met the chairman of the health authority to discuss its financial position.

Mr. Davies: Does not the fact that there is real disquiet on the part of those involved in the Health Service in Mid-Glamorgan cause anxiety to the Minister? Does he accept that Wales has one of the lowest per capita expenditures on the National Health Service in Europe and that the 5·5 per cent. allocated to Mid-Glamorgan for 1986 is inadequate? Is he aware that we have the third longest waiting list for hospital admissions in the whole of the United Kingdom and that there is no prospect of an improvement in that situation until he and the Government start to change their policies?

Mr. Robinson: We are concerned about the situation in Mid-Glamorgan. That is why we are helping the health authority in its current difficulties. However, on the basis of the latest formula assessment, Mid-Glamorgan is shown to be funded at virtually the correct level.

Block Grant (Clwyd)

11. **Mr. Raffan** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the reduction in Clwyd's block grant figure for 1986-87 between the provisional announcement last July and December's settlement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The county chief executive and treasurer have written to me, as has my hon. Friend.

Mr. Raffan: When my right hon. Friend decides how to re-distribute the underclaimed grant, will he give special consideration to Clwyd's financial predicament, which his own officials concede has been aggravated by what they describe as the "unfortunate" wide difference between its provisional and final block grant figures?

Mr. Edwards: I agree that there was a change between the provisional indications and the final figure, for the reasons that have been given previously in the House and in correspondence. I shall certainly bear in mind what my hon. Friend says, but I have also made it clear that it is not my intention to use those funds to encourage or compensate high-spending authorities. I shall have to take proper account of those authorities which have sought to meet, and have succeeded in meeting the Government's objective.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Staff

25. **Mr. Greenway** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, how many staff are paid, fully or in part, by the Church Commissioners, to work in the service of diocesan bishops, at what cost and in what capacities; and if he will make a statement.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing Church Commissioners (Sir William van Straubenzee): There are 177 full-time or part-time staff working in the service of diocesan bishops. They include 21 chaplains, 88 secretaries and 68 chaffeurs, handymen and gardeners. The cost to the commissioners is £893,000 per annum.

Mr. Greenway: Has my hon. Friend ever had a ride in a bishop's car? When do bishops have chauffeurs and when do they not? Secondly, what do the handymen do that the bishops cannot do? Thirdly, why was £10,000 spent on research into the political attitude of the vicars and other clergy?

Sir William van Straubenzee: For the average diocesan bishop, the staff is one part-time chaplain, two full-time secretaries, one part-time chauffeur and one part-time gardener-handyman. I have no doubt that the bishops are more than capable of doing the work for themselves, possibly with the exception of secretarial work. However, the support that they need to fulfil their wider diocesan work must result in their being backed up adequately, and that is the reason for the expenditure.

Mr. Stokes: Is my hon. Friend aware that it is necessary for bishops to have a proper advisory secretarial staff so that, when they speak on public affairs, their remarks are well-informed? Does my hon. Friend agree that they have a right so to speak, whether or not we agree with what they say?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It must be remembered that some of the bishops have very long distances to travel to the ends of their dioceses, and many of the senior bishops have duties to perform outside their dioceses.

I must apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) for not replying to his question about £10,000 being spent on research. The money for the survey to which he referred was not provided by the Church Commissioners, and I am not, therefore, answerable for it to the House. The survey embraced a number of social and other attitudes, and the results were helpful in the compiling of a report.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the hon. Gentleman not get tired of veiled attacks on the Church by his hon. Friends?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I do not think that they are attacks. Sometimes questions come from pleasant hon. Friends who just wish to put an edge on the courtesies that they would like to extend to me.

Mr. Winnick: Did the Church Commissioners or the bishops have any comments to make on the remarks of the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes), who said about the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's supplementary question does not seem to be much related to bishops' staffs.

Mr. Winnick: I am coming to that, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman said that the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should be replaced by a red-blooded Englishman. Do such——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That has nothing to do with the question.

Clergy (Stipends)

26. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what information the commissioners have as to the number of clergy whose stipends are topped up by other organisations or employers in respect of chaplaincies and other appointments; and if he will make a statement.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Approximately 1,200 out of the 8,300 vicars and rectors receive part of their stipends in part-time chaplaincies and similar appointments.

Mr. Bruinvels: I thank my hon. Friend for revealing the number of clergymen who receive additions to their stipends. Can he give information and details about the amount that is given to top up the £7,000 stipends for those clergymen who go into schools, or should be encouraged to do so, to check whether religious education is being properly taught and whether the morning assembly is being carried out? Does that form part of the duties of the clergy, or should it be part of their duties under the Education Act 1944?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I must not mislead my hon. Friend. The figures that I gave were with part-time earnings taken into account, and not additional.

On the second point, it is not likely that any financial consideration is involved in entering into schools, but, like my hon. Friend, I attach the greatest importance to the presence of the clergy in their parish on appropriate occasions.

Mr. Frank Field: Given the importance of the laity's contribution to the level of the clergy's salaries, is it not a little rich for the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) to ask such questions when, before Christmas, he was asking us to take strike action to reduce the amount of money available to the Church?

Sir William van Straubenzee: I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) needs any protection from me for any statements that he makes in the country or in the House.

THE ARTS

Industrial Archaeological Heritage

27. **Mr. Adley** asked the Minister for the Arts what steps he is taking to promote the preservation of the nation's industrial archaeological heritage.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): My responsibility for the industrial archaeological heritage relates primarily to museums and their collections. My arts budget supports the relevant national museums, the local museum purchase and conservation grant funds, and the national heritage memorial fund. While I encourage worthwhile industrial heritage preservation projects, the resources devoted to these by the institutions from within their grants are largely matters for their judgment.

Mr. Adley: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply, and I declare an interest. Does he agree that the Science museum and the National railway museum have a vital role to play in preserving the nation's industrial archaeology and that they value their independent status, which is a source of confidence to them? Will my right hon. Friend therefore confirm that he has no plans to change the system whereby each museum has its own parliamentary Vote?

Mr. Luce: I acknowledge that my hon. Friend has a very close interest not only in the Science museum but in the National railway museum. I know the important role that he plays in their affairs. I am glad that the Science museum spends a considerable amount of its annual purchase grant on industrial items. As for the last part of my hon. Friend's question, a written statement will be published at 3.30 this afternoon.

Business Sponsorship

28. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Minister for the Arts what is the present level of business sponsorship for the arts.

Mr. Luce: The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts estimates the figure at about £20 million.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the level of business sponsorship could be substantially increased if companies were allowed, along the lines of the American model, to deduct their donations to charity up to an agreed limit of pre-tax profits? Does he further agree that that would be cost effective, because, for each pound of tax revenue forgone, expenditure on the arts would increase by almost £3?

Mr. Luce: It is important to acknowledge the significant contribution that the business sponsorship incentive scheme has made to increasing the amount of money for the arts in the last 15 or 16 months. It now amounts to £6·7 million. That is a great deal of additional money for the arts, and I have increased the amount in the financial budget for the forthcoming year. My hon. Friend knows that a number of positive tax changes have been made in the last few years. They are designed to encourage additional business sponsorship of the arts, and I hope that there will be further improvements. My hon. Friend's specific question ought to be addressed to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Freud: I thank the Minister for looking further into the question raised by the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo). Will he tell the House how many applications, under the business sponsorship incentive scheme, were turned down last year because it had run out of money?

Mr. Luce: The scheme has not run out of money. It is continuing throughout this financial year. I have already announced that there will be an increase in the taxpayers' investment in the scheme to the tune of £1·75 million in the coming financial year.

Mr. St. John-Stevas: Since business sponsorship has tragically failed to raise the small sum of money needed to keep the Sadler's Wells theatre open, what plans has my right hon. Friend for finding the £250,000 that would save the nation from a major cultural disaster?

Mr. Luce: I acknowledge the importance of my right hon. Friend's question, and I am glad to be able to tell the

House that the Arts Council has made an announcement on that important matter today. It has called a meeting with Sadler's Wells and the three companies which regularly use the theatre to discuss a possible solution. That would involve the Arts Council giving the companies additional funds to enable them to pay an economic rent for the theatre. I hope and believe that in that way the theatre can be kept open.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister aware that the figure of £20 million for business sponsorship is only an estimate, and I believe that it is far less than that? Will he take steps to ensure that the recording of business sponsorship money for the arts is more accurate than the present guesstimates, otherwise a misleading impression will be given?

Mr. Luce: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. In fact, I suspect that that is a conservative estimate. We work in conjunction with the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, which exists to encourage the sponsorship of arts organisations by business. I accept that it is difficult to put a precise figure on it. It is a guesstimate.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I strongly endorse the thoughts offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), but, in the meantime, will my right hon. Friend look at some of the anomolies in the present business sponsorship tax regime? In particular, will he consider whether sponsorship of capital projects could be made tax-deductible, as is sponsorship of revenue projects? Will he ensure that the rules governing the provision of entertainment facilities at sponsored events are both sensible and sensibly administered?

Mr. Luce: I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in finding ways in which we can encourage further sponsorship and support for the arts. I know that some of those ideas have been put forward by ABSA and submitted to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the end of the day it is for him to decide what further improvements he can introduce.

Local Government Reform

29. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Minister for the Arts whether he anticipates there being as much local arts activity after the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils as before.

Mr. Luce: Genuinely local arts activity is a matter in which local authorities should play the leading part. The Government had agreed to take on a larger share of arts funding generally, following abolition, but central and local funds are both required if the amount and quality of arts activity are to be maintained.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I accept what the Minister says about the need for partnership, but without backing from regional arts associations' funds, surely there is no way in which the local authorities can make that up? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra believes itself to be under threat, and that, seven weeks away from abolition, there is no joint committee to administer the situation in West Yorkshire? Surely something must be done to ensure that the whole panoply of arts activities in the regions are better supported than they are.

Mr. Luce: It is important to note that the Government have taken on considerable additional responsibilities on behalf of the taxpayer and have thus relieved local authorities of burdens in the GLC and metropolitan areas to the tune of £43 million of additional taxpayers' money. We are not looking to an enormous sum in successor authority support for local arts activities. It is up to them to demonstrate the interest that they wish to show in their local arts activities.

Mr. Jessel: As abolition might have affected Sadler's Wells, should we not all rejoice at the Arts Council's decision to try to find more funds to save Sadler's Wells and warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on having used his influence to bring that about?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is, of course, principally the responsibility of the Arts Council to find a satisfactory solution. I am glad that it is to have this important meeting on Friday 14 February. I believe that it is moving towards a solution which will enable the theatre to remain open.

Mr. Buchan: Is not it nonsense to dwell on the marvellous news about Sadler's Wells when almost every theatre and concert hall throughout the land is in a state of acute crisis? Is not the reason for that the right hon. Gentleman's failure to replace local authorities' funds? Is it not a bit of a sick joke to suggest that money could be found by the local authorities, which, when they try to spend it, are rate capped, and, when they are not rate capped, are abolished?

Mr. Luce: It is unbelievable that the hon. Gentleman has managed to conjure up the most astonishing language to describe the fact that the Government have produced £43 million of additional money to support the arts in the GLC and metropolitan areas. I do not think that it is unreasonable to look to successor authorities, which already spend £7 billion, to play their small part in sharing in the sponsorship and support of arts activities.

Library Service

30. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had with local authorities on efficiency savings in the library service.

Mr. Luce: Management of the library service is a direct responsibility of local authorities, but I am concerned that full value should be obtained from the resources allocated to it. With this aim in mind, I commissioned studies of methods of costing library services and assessing their performance, which I hope will help local authorities to manage these services and monitor their effectiveness.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of our libraries are located on prime sites in the community? Will he urge local authorities to explore the potential for partnership development schemes with the private sector? That will release resources which will make our already excellent library service even better for its customers.

Mr. Luce: In the past few weeks I have visited a number of exceptional libraries, including Sutton, Hillingdon, and even some in my county. I have been impressed by the enterprise of a number of those libraries in providing additional services above the basic book loan service. That helps to improve the overall facilities available to the public in those areas.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Benn: My point of order does not arise out of Question Time. If other hon. Members have points of order that arise out of Question Time, I could put mine in a moment.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We shall move on to statutory instruments, but I shall take the point of order first.

Mr. Benn: The point I wish to raise arises from the exceptionally severe weather regulations made by the Secretary of State for Social Services. The weather conditions in Derbyshire have been severe. Under the regulations, the Secretary of State has given discretion to local managers of DHSS offices to decide whether to bring the regulations into effect to allow heating grants to be made to people on supplementary benefit.

My point of order concerns a matter of substance to thousands of people facing severe weather conditions who are likely to be denied their benefits. I cannot raise this matter in the House, because the Secretary of State has made regulations that put responsibility on local managers of DHSS offices. I cannot bring pressure through the House on the managers of local offices because they are not directly responsible to the House. This is a matter of great concern to a large number of people. I should be grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, if you would advise me on how the matter can be raised.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member is a great expert in these matters. It is not a matter for the Chair to advise him how to raise matters in the House. He has already done that.

Questions to Ministers

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order arises out of Question Time.

In answering my question No. 27, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts said that he would be making a written statement at 3.30 pm. Will you encourage Ministers who wish to make statements relevant to their subjects to answer questions in the morning, if they insist on giving written answers, so that we can see the answers and respond at Question Time?

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I should like to back up strongly what the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) has said. There is another reason for my support. We have a mere 10 minutes of arts questions every three weeks. It would be useful, especially with this Department—it is true of all Departments—if we could have the information available so that we could get our teeth into some meat during this period.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for written statements. I think that the Minister for the Arts meant that he would give a written answer.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There are two matters for which you are responsible. The first is the tabling of oral questions. I notice that on today's Order Paper, questions Nos. 22 and 24 were asked by one Conservative Member. Does that mean that other hon. Members will have licence in future to table more than one question, and, if so——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I draw the hon. Member's attention to the Order Paper. He will see that question No. 24 is to the Secretary of State for Transport—a different Department.

Mr. Powell: My second point, Mr. Speaker, relates to the coupling of questions. I know that you may not be responsible for——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are taking time from private Member's motions. That is not a matter for me. I do not decide whether questions are linked. That is for the Department involved.

Mr. Powell: As you are not responsible for the coupling of questions, Mr. Speaker, which is the Minister's responsibility, I hope you will bear that in mind when it comes to calling hon. Members whose questions are coupled, because two Conservative Members have been called on supplementary questions on three occasions. Some Opposition Members, excluding myself, who tabled questions were not called because their questions were not reached.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows that I do link questions where I can, but it is hardly fair to make that comment today when more Back Benchers were called from the Opposition side than from the Government side. If the hon. Member looks at the Order Paper, he will find that every hon. Member who had a question on the Order Paper to the Secretary of State for Wales was called this afternoon.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Arising out of questions, the Secretary of

State for Wales accused me of misleading the House by quoting from a statement by the chief executive of the Welsh water authority. I should like to repeat that statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the hon. Lady to do that. That would be an extension of Question Time. We frequently hear answers in the Chamber with which we disagree. If I allow the Lady to take up such a challenge, I would have to do that for every other hon. Member. It would not be fair.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I quoted from the letter, I think it would be helpful if I were to lay the full text of the letter in the Library of the House of Commons. That is what I propose to do.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said, but he made an unwarranted attack upon my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). My hon. Friend speaks the truth and stands by the statement that she made to the House on Wednesday on water authority matters. The water authority's position on privatisation is on record, and the right hon. Gentleman has no mandate to privatise water in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I made no attack. I merely quoted from a letter addressed to me from someone who felt aggrieved by something said by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd).

Mr. Speaker: I shall allow the hon. Lady one comment.

Mrs. Clwyd: It would have been courteous if the chief executive of the Welsh water authority had sent me a copy of the letter. I expect an apology because, in a conversation I had with him, he said that he could see no benefit in the privatisation of the Welsh water authority.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &C.

Ordered,

That the Waste Regulation and Disposal (Authorities) Order 1985 (S.I., 1985, No. 1884) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Education and Training

3.38 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I beg to move,

That this House calls for future policy towards 14 to 19 year olds to be based on a close integration of education, training and the Youth Service, taking full account of the aims and objectives of Industry Year.

I realise that terms such as education, training, and Industry Year might all be said to be "good things" in the sense that that description was used in "1066 and All That". The debate could therefore be an occasion for a well-meaning canter round the course notching up worthy platitudes and generally exhibiting care and concern. I hope that we shall do better than that. Conservative Members could indulge in a welter of congratulations on a mounting series of initiatives taken by the Government. I believe that the Government deserve congratulations on many moves which they have made in that sphere. I hope that, instead of relying purely on congratulations, we will concentrate more on looking ahead at how policy might now develop.

A great deal has happened and is happening in education and training. I should like to sharpen the focus of the argument. I shall suggest a plan and what it should entail and I shall talk about some of the problems associated with it. I want to mention the often neglected aspect of youth provision—the youth service. I have a suggestion to make about careers education which is a vital ingredient of any strategy for education and training. Then, in case the links between industry and education have not been explicit in what has gone before, I shall direct some remarks to the subject of Industry Year and its objectives.

The general thrust of the motion, in particular its reference to the integration of education and training, seems to have fairly strong backing. A great deal has been written about the way in which the policy should evolve. Even the Government, in many of their statements, seem to favour something like integration. Basically, it appears that the Government want all young people to have the opportunity to follow a more relevant and practical curriculum leading to the achievement of recognised standards of competence and qualification. I note that there are indications, perhaps pre-eminently through the technical and vocational education initiative, that this opportunity should begin at the age of 14. I also note that the youth training scheme is now intended as a permanent feature. That is made clear in the White Paper entitled "Education and Training for Young People". I most certainly welcome that development.

Apart from that White Paper, we have seen the publication of "Better Schools" and we are seeing the continued development of the technical and vocational education initiative. Discussions are taking place on the initiative of the Manpower Services Commission on non-advanced further education. We are seeing a review of vocational qualifications and the introduction of advanced supplementary levels of examination. We are seeing the certificate of pre-vocational education. We are seeing the college-employer links project, and the introduction of the general certificate of secondary education and we have also seen the introduction of information technology centres.

[Mr. Alan Haselhurst]

I do not believe that that is a fully comprehensive list, but it shows that the Government have been busy and imaginative in what they have been trying to create in education and training. However, one could be less polite about it. I notice that the National Association of Head Teachers is being more critical when it describes muddle and confusion as arising from all of that. Perhaps there is something of a child's puzzle about it—those children's puzzles where one is invited to follow pieces of string or lines which are in a jumble and one is never sure which leads to the end of the maze. I think that some of those dead ends now need to be reconnected so that there is more coherence in the picture.

If the House is confused by the welter of initiatives that have been taken and their varying purposes, what about the consumer? How is he to understand what the best course is for him to pursue? The Government are to be given credit for opening up a system for creating great flexibility and widening choice, but perhaps there is now a need to remould before some of the new developments that have been set in train assume their own rigidity and become harder to adapt and adjust into a coherent whole.

The plan that I would put forward, at least to set the argument going, is that we should envisage that education and training most certainly should begin at the age of 14. Basically, there would be three choices. There would be an academically oriented course; a technical and vocationally oriented course; and a workplace oriented course. But before I examine the arguments to support that proposition, I should like to make one immediate point. The National Association of Head Teachers has produced a consultative document on 14 to 18-year-olds. It comes from a working party headed by Mr. John Swallow, the headmaster of Ongar comprehensive school. I have known him for several years, and have great respect not only for what he achieves at his school but for his great knowledge of these matters. Therefore, in answer to any possible criticism from that source, I should like to say that I am not advocating a stratified system. I am looking at the plan that I have put forward very much on the horizontal plane and not on the vertical plane. Those choices should be regarded as equal.

What assumptions lie behind that plan? First, the opportunities that the plan presents should start at the age of 14. Sixteen is altogether too late. By the age of 16, alas, too many people have already opted out of the system—perhaps because they no longer pay attention or gain from classroom experience, or, more dramatic still, they may simply absent themselves from scholastic establishments. We are losing out on too many people if we think that they can be kept in full-time education, in the traditional sense, until 16. I understand that in professional circles today it is argued that 14 might be too late. I suppose that it depends on the quality of the education before that age. I believe that there must be a balance between achieving a broad foundation in education and concentrating on vocational studies.

The TVEI experience suggests that 14 is a realistic age. I note that the drop-out rate from TVEI courses is significantly less than the equivalent drop-out rate from full-time ordinary traditional education. Therefore, I believe that 14 is realistic.

The other assumption is that there should be no work before 18. In that regard, I am on song with the National Association of Head Teachers.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Does my hon. Friend accept that rather than being hidebound to the age of 14, which can fall at any time within 12 months, the plan should start in the 14th year, at the beginning of that academic year?

Mr. Haselhurst: I recognise my hon. Friend's point. That problem bedevils the education system at many different points earlier than that. That is a detail to be worked out. I say that with no disrespect to my hon. Friend. I fully understand the importance of the point that he makes.

The other assumption is that there should be no work before 18. The National Association of Head Teachers calls that raising the preparation age of young people, which is a fair way of expressing it. We have only to look at the experience of other countries to realise that the time between the ages of 14 and 18 can be spent usefully by all people within those age groups. In Britain we under-prepare our young people for work. I wish it to become the expected norm that full-time work begins only at the age of 18.

Several imperatives are associated with such a plan, of which the first is coherence. In the motion I have used the word "integration", but, in this context, I do not believe that there is much difference in meaning between integration and coherence. Education and training should be spanned in an understandable way. What is done along the chosen route of the three that I have suggested must relate to what is happening in the other routes. The whole system should be based on a mix of education, training and work experience. The mix should vary in the different channels, but remain consistent with the established objective of increasing the amount of practical and work-based learning for those over 14 years. That implies a modular system. Sufficient work has already been done to suggest that such a system is attainable.

The second imperative must be a connection between the routes, because I do not propose three parallel or separate lines. I have referred to routes and channels, but, emphatically, I do not mean tunnels. The routes must be visible with regular cross-over points, which may interweave. Someone could start in a work-oriented course and later revert to the academic stream, followed by a mix of technical, vocational or work-based experience, depending on what is suitable for that person. Cross-over and mingling are needed because the present system is characterised by the inability of people to make second or third choices. At present there are rare opportunities to go back on a decision taken earlier in life. If one is set on the wrong route from the start, it can be the greatest of all difficulties to make the best of one's talents.

How can we realistically expect young people at the age of 14, 16 or 18 to make a decision that will affect the whole of their lives? It is possible to talk to university undergraduates today and discover that even they, with their relative advantages, are uncertain about the job or career that they want in life.

I speak from my own experience of having great uncertainty, almost up to the last minute, about which opportunity to take. I was fortunate in those days, because I had a choice of which line to take. It is hideously difficult

for anyone of school age in a rapidly changing world to decide what to do. We must give people every chance to be able to switch about between the different routes and channels that we can create for them. The participants in the education and training system must be able to seek more academic or more practical learning as their circumstances dictate.

A further imperative is that the nature of my proposed system should be recognised by parents. Too many parents and perhaps too many children regard non-academic work as second best. There must be parity of esteem between the various courses that could be undertaken in an integrated system. We do not want to perpetuate a system that regards 40 per cent. of our young people as failures. We can do better.

Employers must recognise what is intended in such a system and qualifications must be rationalised. The current review of vocational qualifications may provide a valuable start in that direction. Employers must understand what they are getting when young people present themselves for work. It follows that employers must have a greater input into the system and must make clearer what they expect from potential recruits.

A final imperative is that a plan for young people aged between 14 and 18 must be merely the foundation for continuing education. Education to the age of 18 or 19 is not an end in itself. It is no longer a matter of people finding one job to keep them going throughout life. They will have to renew their skills, training and education at various times. That takes us outside the motion, so I shall not pursue the point.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): My hon. Friend has given an interesting analysis of how young people can get involved in careers after leaving school. What role does he see for careers teachers? Should not they be liaising with local industry and businesses to make sure that there is a place ready for a child who is about to leave school?

Mr. Haselhurst: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I deal with that aspect in a moment rather than break the sequence of my remarks.

Some problems will attend the sort of plan that I have put forward. Perhaps the most difficult problem that will have to be faced if we are to have an integrated policy is maintenance allowances for young people. That issue will have to be tackled. I do not see how we can perpetuate a system in which only those on youth training schemes are paid an allowance and that others are paid nothing. There is evidence that people are moving from TVEI schemes into the youth training scheme for that reason. We cannot ignore that fact.

Maintenance allowances would have obvious resource implications and all Conservative Members speak with trepidation when implying that new resources are required. However, I am not sure that vast extra sums would be required if we used a little imagination about the considerable sums already spent, directly or indirectly, on young people in this age group.

If we put all that money together and perhaps divert child benefit, in part or in whole, from the parent to the child, it may be possible to find a solution that would be broadly tolerable, cover the entire age range and remove biases in the system for youngsters to consider academically-orientated, technical or vocational-oriented or workplace-oriented routes. The problem is difficult, but it will have to be faced eventually.

Vested interests will have to be tackled. It will be all too easy for teachers and employers to take a narrow traditional view and there may be tensions and jealousies between local education authorities and the Manpower Services Commission if it is felt that the MSC has moved in with more money to supplant the work of the education authority. I can only appeal for flexibility, tolerance and a willingness to co-operate among all the partners in the system. Enough has been said and done to suggest that people can and will respond if they see an emerging national need. Therefore, I am by no means without hope that everyone can co-operate in producing a viable system for the future.

There is one other problem. This may be an idiosyncratic quirk on my part, but I think that others feel the same way. If we are to bring about the extent of change that I have described, there must be leadership from the top. That might mean having a Department of State that combines education and training under one roof. I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to respond to that point today; it may have to be dealt with at a higher level in Government. However, I believe that that will ultimately be necessary. I am emboldened to say that because I believe that some of my colleagues also believe that it must be tackled.

I would like to see the work done by the youth service integrated into education and training. It must be truer now than in 1974—when I had the honour to introduce the Youth and Community Bill—that many young people need counselling outside the home and the school. People may regret that fact, and obviously we all hope that young people can find the support and advice that they need from their parents and homes, which can be supplemented at school. Alas, the realities of life are rather different. A growing number of young people experience difficulty in finding support and help in either of those places. Therefore, there is a role there for the youth service. I see it as a major counselling service as well as one that can help young people to find constructive leisure.

To some extent, those matters will be covered in the courses undertaken in the 14 to 19-year-old plan—for example, the work done by Project Trident and the YMCA "Training for Life" programme. There are other schemes, and I am not denigrating them by not mentioning them. Interesting work is being done in that sphere. The efforts of the youth service should be integrated into the general sytem rather more specifically and carefully than hitherto. I do not want the youth service to remain a financially poor, unco-ordinated and spasmodic service. It has struggled as a Cinderella for far too long.

I hope that in making remarks about career structure and education I shall respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels). There must be a quantum increase in careers education, and it must go further down the school system. The current volume is not sufficient to provide an effective service, and I do not believe that that service is currently as efficient as it should be. We should consider a new, combined, independent service merging careers teaching —which is under-funded—with the careers advisory service. I do not see why someone should not be employed in a school by a new centralised careers service. That

[Mr. Haselhurst]

person would spend most of his time in that school providing careers education and advice for the pupils and, perhaps, help on other courses that come within his ambit. He would have responsibility for liaising with industry to ensure that opportunities are created that match the product of the various courses in his district. That would be a useful way forward, and I commend it to the House.

Included in my motion is a reference to Industry Year. There has, of course, been a full and interesting debate on that during private Members' time, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King). I do not want to cover the same ground today, but it is an objective — some say the most important objective—of Industry Year to improve understanding between education and industry. I hope that that objective has been largely assumed in much of what I have already said. There is an opportunity today, however, to stress that each needs the other. Industry is vitally concerned with what happens in education and training, while education and training need to rely heavily on industry to provide a decent service for the pupils and trainees.

Industry needs to be not only the provider but a great source of influence on our education and training system. It can help to bring education alive so that it is no longer drab, dull and apparently irrelevant. There is a great deal of evidence that teachers can gain from experience within industry. Many of our major companies, at their own expense, have undertaken schemes to ensure the translation of their people into schools and teachers into their companies. Those who have already experienced that say that it has been of great benefit.

Such useful initiatives, whether from the CBI or individual companies, have helped to forge better understanding. However, the coverage is far from universal. The CBI states that its "Understanding British Industry" scheme covers only about 5 per cent. of our teaching force. The CBI's aim during Industry Year is to improve that coverage to about 40 per cent.—but even then we shall still be very much behind the sort of standards that we should achieve.

What more can be done? If there is an integration of much of our education and training, that must mean a greater contribution from industry. The MSC is due all credit for helping employers and trade unions to understand that point. Perhaps we should take up a point in a report published only today by the eastern region of the CBI which suggests that more business men should be governors of schools. That is something that we have not previously considered sufficiently.

I wonder whether we would encourage the further involvement of industry by giving a little financial inducement. There will be no difficulty in encouraging the ICIs, BPs and IBMs of this world to do valuable work; it is the smaller companies that wonder whether they have the time to make the necessary contribution. Perhaps such efforts—which can be quantified where business men are giving their or their employees' time to help the development of training and education off their premises—should be tax deductible. We would quickly regain any such concession in the quality of trainee and pupil emerging from the system.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: I am sorry to take up my hon. Friend's time. Is he aware that one of the leading community colleges in Leicester, Judgemeadow, funds a large number of projects through the local authority and local businesses, whose representatives serve on the board of governors? Teachers and pupils have the opportunity to try out computers and machine tools. That initiative is working in Leicester.

Mr. Haselhurst: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Many firms have been extremely generous and far-sighted. The volume of activity will increase, but it must increase quickly. We do not wish to be struggling in another 10 years and to have reached only 60 or 70 per cent. of the teaching force in Britain. I suggested that the expense of this activity could be tax-deductible because it could hurry the process along. I am not implying that, without such a concession, firms would not do what was right both in their interests and in the national interests.

Mr. Holt: On the question of available resources, has my hon. Friend given consideration to the many employers who have expensive capital equipment which technical colleges and other places of education simply cannot match in terms of resources? In the industry in which I worked we had machinery of which no trainee would have had any experience in the formal educational sense other than through the company. The company had down time on the machinery when it was not producing. The technical colleges will not be able to train the people who are required unless there is some financial inducement.

Mr. Haselhurst: My hon. Friend makes a valid point which may be allied to what I have said. I do not want to go into the question of the availability of equipment and hardware, although it does present a problem. It may be that the hardware is scattered too far and wide—that which is available in technical colleges and that which is available only within the premises of employers. More thought must be given to how we can make equipment more accessible to more people.

However clear may be the pattern of education and training in the future, and however much we commend individuals, the Manpower Services Commission, companies and teachers, we need the help of the Government. This Government, I believe sincerely, have shown that their heart is in the right place. *[Laughter.]* It is all very well for the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mr. Golding) to laugh. Obviously, he wishes to discount and discredit all that has been done. That is most unfair and unreasonable.

Some of the Government initiatives have been taken a little late in the Government's life. I would have preferred some of them to have been started immediately the Government came to office. However, I will not knock what the Government are doing now. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the value of these initiatives is recognised in all sections of industry. It is not a matter for silly denigrating laughter. The hon. Gentleman should know better.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Surely the hon. Gentleman will be sympathetic to a degree of cynicism from these Benches? Most of the so-called progress that has taken place over the past six years has come about because there are 4 million unemployed, 1¼ million of whom are young people. That is why the Government are instituting most of these reforms.

Mr. Haselhurst: I did not especially want to inject a note of controversy into this afternoon's proceedings. I

thought that the concepts which I put forward would be treated on their merits and sympathetically throughout the House—give a little there and take a little here.

If the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) makes a jibe about this Government reacting for the wrong motives—the increase in unemployment—one can point to the last Labour Government when we had mounting unemployment, though below what we have experienced recently. The Labour Government did not lift a finger to do anything when many believed that action should be taken. There was not much support on the Opposition Benches for the Youth and Community Bill. The Labour Government had five years to take action but they did nothing.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): My hon. Friend may recall the memoirs of the then Chief Secretary, Lord Barnett. In them he gave a blow-by-blow account of how Mrs. Williams went to the Cabinet with a scheme similar to the youth training scheme. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and other leading figures in the then Labour Government whittled the scheme away and the pilot scheme was given only £7 million. That was all Mrs. Williams got.

Mr. Haselhurst: My hon. Friend obviously has a stronger stomach than me for the memoirs of former Labour Ministers, but he has made a useful point.

I believe that there have been several good beginnings, and they have received widespread backing and much political good will, despite the laughter of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme. If I may change the metaphor slightly, it seems that almost all the pieces of the jigsaw are now on the table and it is not unreasonable to call on the Government to start fitting the pieces together. If the Government do so, we can then offer a new and recognisable deal to young people. We must create new opportunities in industry in Britain to put it on a par, in terms of its most important raw material, human beings, with other nations with which it must compete. If the Government act, they will give fresh encouragement to the teaching profession after the present difficult dispute has been brought to an end. The Government must show that they have the will and determination to complete what they have begun. I believe that the moment for that has come.

4.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Chris Patten): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) twice over. First, I congratulate him on his success in the ballot and, secondly, I congratulate him on his use of that success. My hon. Friend knows more about this subject than most of us. He has proved that to us this afternoon, not least with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the rather Orwellian acronyms that litter the education and training landscape. My hon. Friend has been years ahead in calling for the close integration of education and training in the youth service. I hope I shall be able to show my hon. Friend that we are at least beginning to catch him up.

I start with three propositions on which I think I will carry even Opposition Members. First, it is clear that there has been substantial historic concern about the relationship between education and training. If my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) were here this afternoon he would confirm that Prince Albert himself would have waxed indignantly about the technician gap. That concern has been sharpened by high unemployment and the pace of technological change. These two factors have meant that for most young people entry into the job market has been delayed for a couple of years. For most young people it has become crystal clear that a permanent, once-and-for-all plunge into the job market, with no training after the age of 16, offers a questionable future.

The second proposition is that we have failed, because of the absurd and debilitating polarisation between so-called academic learning and so-called vocational learning, to bring together education and training.

We need general education courses which are also practical and relevant, and we need vocational courses which include those elements of general education necessary to foster the qualities which employers say that they want. It seems ridiculous to suggest that anybody who ever emphasises the importance of general education is an effete, wishy-washy, dare I say wet, descendant of Dr. Arnold, and personally accountable for the decline of the British industrial spirit. It is equally ridiculous to suggest that anybody who talks about the importance of relevance in education is a utilitarian, uncouth and uncivilised descendant of Mr. Gradgrind.

In a remarkable book on the philosophy of education written a few years ago, Mary Warnock argued that education should be regarded as a preparation for the good life and that, for most people, the good life should include work, and that education had to take account of that. I endorse that point of view, although I would not necessarily want to associate Mary Warnock with Dr. Arnold or with Mr. Gradgrind.

The third proposition is that it is in the interests of education and of industry to know more about each other, but it is rather depressing that a nation with a history such as ours needs Industry Year, but there it is. I hope, nevertheless, that Industry Year is a substantial success and that it helps education and industry to break out of the vicious circle in which both sides undervalue the other's work.

When addressing the curricular and institutional problems of education and training, we are dealing mostly with what happens after 16, but what happens before is vital. My hon. Friend understandably mentioned the age of 14 as a starting point in his motion. If we get right what happens between five and 16, and the curriculum is, according to the famous quartet, broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated, and if we are able to raise the threshold of achievement for those of average ability and those of below average ability, the problems after 16 are much easier to deal with.

I do not want today to engage in another argument about the teachers' dispute, which we have managed to discuss several times recently. However, I should like to make it clear once again that I wholly take the point that, unless we have a better trained, more highly motivated and better paid teaching force with clear conditions of service, our other ambitions for education before and after 16 are as dust in the wind.

I have mentioned the importance of balance. The technical and vocational education initiative is clearly relevant in that regard. As my hon. Friend will know, it is an initiative in which we are investing about £220 million of taxpayers' money. It should help to increase liaison between industry and education. I understand that

[Mr. Chris Patten]

my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment will want to say a little more about that if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are considering carefully the wider application to all secondary schools of the lessons that we have learnt from the pilot TVEI projects.

As for breadth and balance, what young people are taught and how they are trained should not be determined, let alone narrowed, by examinations. Examinations should be the servant and not the master of the curriculum. Young people should be well advised about the routes rather than the tunnels that they take through the education and training system, and they should be able to transfer from one route to another according to their abilities or ambitions. It is in that spirit that the Government have acted to reform national exams at 16-plus, 17-plus and 18-plus, starting at 16-plus with the general certificate of secondary education.

The GCSE is one of the most important education reforms since the war. It has been discussed for at least 15 years. Nobody can legitimately argue that progress has been exactly helter-skelter. The examination puts greater emphasis on practical skills and application as well as on knowledge and understanding. I believe that it will do much to prepare young people better for adult and working life. It should motivate and engage pupils to achieve more. It seems to provide a better and fairer way in which to assess pupils at the end of the compulsory period of schooling and a means of establishing a sound basis for all post-16 education and training, including the youth training scheme, the certificate of pre-vocational education, A-levels, and full-time vocational courses.

The preparations for the GCSE are quite literally unprecedented. Most have gone according to plan, and some have gone slightly ahead of plan. I do not doubt that the timetable is extremely tight or that the task of introducing the exam is tough and puts additional demands on secondary school teachers. The timetable has always been tight and the job of introducing the exam has always been tough. But nothing that has happened in the past year or so has made the timetable any tighter or the task any tougher.

Teaching the new syllabuses will start this autumn and the examination will be sat for the first time in the summer of 1988. Retreat from that timetable is not an option. We cannot put into reverse the preparations that have been made so far and then start up again 12 months later.

I hope that we shall have the opportunity to discuss the GCSE at some stage. We shall of course listen sympathetically to any suggestions, whether they come from examining groups, employers, or teacher unions, about how we might add to the preparations that have already been made and help smooth the introduction of this important examination. We are prepared to listen sympathetically to any proposals. We are not prepared, however, to abandon the examination and to preside over what I believe would be an absolutely chaotic retreat.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Has the Minister had correspondence from teachers who are responsible for introducing the new GCSE? Only last week, I had correspondence from representatives of the whole of the north of England saying that there is little likelihood of the examination being introduced in September because there is already chaos in schools regarding examinations.

Mr. Patten: I have had a good deal of correspondence on the subject. I am in the process of meeting all of the examining groups to discuss it and I have talked to several of the teacher unions, and will continue to do so. There will be chaos only if some of the teacher unions determine that there will be chaos. I do not believe that, in the wake of what we all hope will be a satisfactory settlement under the auspices of ACAS, any responsible secondary teacher, given the help that we are providing with training and our willingness to consider other means of helping, will set out to wreck what all of the teacher unions and everyone else recognise is the most important educational advance for pupils of this age for years.

The House knows that we are anxious that the pattern of education for A-level students is too narrow, especially as compared with provision in competitor industrial countries. We must aim for a broader more balanced education for those following A-level courses, whether into higher education or employment. The House will know that we are introducing AS-level examinations in 1989. A-levels will remain, as they set standards of excellence which should be preserved. Nevertheless, some reforms are necessary, for example, in establishing criteria for key A-level grades.

There are also interesting developments in individual subjects, such as London's design and technology syllabus, which includes a module on computer-aided engineering, and the Joint Matriculation Board's new common syllabus on foreign languages which puts a great deal more emphasis on practical language skills.

Outside the GCSE and A-level, but with links to them, we have taken two major initiatives in qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds. We have introduced a certificate of pre-vocational education, which is a new qualification for young people of school-leaving age who do not aspire to A-levels or a specifically vocational path, but who wish to remain in full-time education, whether at further education colleges or in schools. It provides a broad course based on general education with a vocational slant. This year may not have been ideal to start such a new syllabus, but about 15,000 pupils have been taking the CPVE course in more than 1,000 schools and further educational colleges. I hope that next year the takeup will be greater. The takeup will be helped if we can do more to publicise this extremely important new course.

The second, and arguably more important, initiative has been our attempt to cut a path through the jungle of vocational qualifications. That is what the review of vocational qualifications under the admirable chairmanship of Mr. Oscar de Ville seeks to do. It will be completed in April, and we look forward to considering its recommendations as soon thereafter as possible.

I am confident that we can build on existing strengths to develop a system of qualifications which is more attractive, relevant and accessible to young people and employers, while defining and maintaining the highest and clearest standards. We need to encourage more and better vocational education and training to produce competent, adaptable and creative individuals that our society and economy obviously need.

Mr. Holt: I wish to refer to the quantum of foreign language teaching and training, although I recognise that

the debate is about training, industry and education. In reply to a recent question I was told that less than 2 per cent. of schools offered Russian or Japanese, and that only two schools offered those subjects in the whole of Scotland. How will we compete, and what resources will the Minister put on the table?

Mr. Patten: One of the themes in our White Paper "Better Schools" was that we needed to broaden the curriculum, and I accept that. It is invidious to choose between one subject and another. Although I recognise the importance of encouraging Japanese teaching and the study of Japanese in our schools, I have recently concentrated more on the importance of physics and mathematics, and on developing consensus about teaching the English language. I have read some documents about teaching the English language in our schools and find them almost incomprehensible. That should be a high priority, although I accept what my hon. Friend says about the importance of ensuring that we produce people who can sell vast quantities of cars to Japan and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Will the Minister tell us what sort of cars we would sell to the Japanese?

Mr. Patten: Those which are described as British.

Mr. John Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): The Minister is blushing. I have never seen a Minister blush before.

Mr. Patten: That is not a blush, but blood pressure. It becomes increasingly difficult to know what one is driving. I have a Morris Minor which is regarded as British, and also a Vauxhall Cavalier, but I am not sure how hon. Gentlemen would describe that.

Better careers guidance is important, not least because if young people make the wrong decision at 15 or 16 it is personally damaging for them, and costly for society. Once young people have made that choice, they should not reckon that future options are constrained by anything other than their determination and ability. Therefore, we need a much wider recognition of the already well-developed route to higher education through vocational qualifications.

Local education authorities must plan provision for 16 to 19-year-olds much more coherently than at present. The distinction between further education colleges and schools has to some extent been blurred, first by the long and, I am pleased to say, sustained tradition in further education colleges of general education, and secondly by the advent of the new sixth former in our schools. Those factors provide reasons for more coherent planning throughout the further education sector and schools.

Two further factors are vital. The first is demography over which, happily, politicians have little influence, except personally. The number of young people in the 16 to 19 age group will fall like a stone at the end of this decade, and in 1993 the number of 16-year-olds, for example, will be about one third lower than the number at the peak in 1981. Secondly, although numbers will fall, I am convinced that the participation rate of young people in education and training will continue to rise even if, as we hope, youth unemployment falls. Young people recognise increasingly that within the job markets of the future those who do not have qualifications will be desperately disadvantaged.

Dr. Hampson: People in Leeds may become worried that my hon. Friend is giving carte blanche to tertiary education. The Labour-controlled council has without consulting headmasters put forward an expensive scheme for the entire city to move from sixth forms to tertiary centres even though many schools, admittedly not necessarily throughout the city, have extremely good sixth forms.

Mr. Patten: I am certainly not giving carte blanche support to anything of the sort. However, local education authorities will have to plan provision across the age range in a way which is educationally sound and cost effective. I have seen various different ways of doing that throughout the country, and the last thing that I wish to do is to impose one solution on the whole country. Without reawakening old controversies, we have been down that path before, and it was not noticeably successful.

To consolidate and improve further education we clearly need to strenthen the partnership between colleges and employers. At present there is no lack of goodwill. Ways of improving the responsiveness of colleges to employers' needs are being explored, for example, through the colleges and employers link project. I have been very impressed by the work of further education colleges in the past four or five months. The colleges are well aware of the importance of better marketing for their courses and of the importance of more flexibility and efficiency in providing the sort of courses that local employers want. The most common complaint I hear is that many employers do not know what they want and that some employers still give insufficient priority to education and training, which I believe is one of the reasons for our economic problems.

The Manpower Services Commission has quite properly been at the forefront in trying to persuade employers that investment in training really is what it says, and is not a dead-weight cost. In particular, in planning work-related, non-advanced further education, the MSC has been able to focus local employers' attention on the opportunities available in local colleges. By acting as a proxy for local employers, the MSC has been able to help colleges respond to the demand from local employers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden was right to refer to the youth service. I would say more about the youth service if I had time, but I want to allow other hon. Member to speak. The youth service has been particularly concerned, over the past few years, with the problems of youth unemployment, particulary in the inner city areas, and with the problems of those who are virtually alienated from formal education. My hon. Friend will know that the National Advisory Council for the Youth Service met for the first time last month. He will not be surprised to know that the council expressed its interest and concern about education and training, and we look forward to hearing more from the council as it gets under way.

In conclusion, I express once again my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden for the spirited and thoughtful way in which he introduced the debate. I hope that the debate will help us to break down some of the rigid distinctions that still exist between education and training. I see the work of the education service being complemented by the expertise of employers and training agencies. We should all regard ourselves as being on the same side. We have a considerable job to do

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if we are not to betray the hopes of a whole generation and if we are not to fall further behind what other countries do in this most important area.

I trust that I have provided my hon. Friend with sufficient evidence to demonstrate that we have set our hand to this extremely important task and that, to follow what my hon. Friend said, we are not just talking but actually doing something about the problem. I would not like to indulge in what Lord Palmerston called the "abuse of metaphor", but I think that we are putting together some of the pieces of the jigsaw.

4.44 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) on initiating this debate and on choosing a subject which is not discussed enough in the Chamber and which should be taken extremely seriously. I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said. Many of his suggestions were both positive and creative. Indeed, many of them could have come from the Labour party manifesto.

However, it emerges from occasions like this—we have had a civilsed debate so far—that there are two faces of Conservatism. One face runs the engine of the Government and the other is a more civilised face which appears in debates like this. It may be that we shall hear a different tone in other speeches, but a visitor from education, in witnessing this debate, would be forgiven for having a feeling of slight unreality.

There have been two speeches from the Conservative Benches which hardly made any mention of the fact that education and training are at a lower ebb than at probably any time since the Education Act 1944. No mention has been made of the longest running dispute in the education service that is harming families, parents and the morale of the teaching profession. Also, the Government have destroyed the traditional training mechanisms. Many of them were imperfect, but at least they existed to train people. I refer to the industrial training boards, skillcentres and, in particular, the apprenticeship system. A visitor from outside would be forgiven for thinking, "What on earth has been going on in the past six years when all that has been ignored in the remarks so far?"

I must bring the House back to a sense of reality. The morale of the teaching profession is lower than it has ever been since 1944. The reason is not simply that teachers deserve better pay. I do not have to descend into the realms of theory. The fact is that teachers of certain subjects are not coming forward. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) mentioned the lack of training in Japanese and Russian. I was reminded by the hon. Gentleman's comments — if we are serious about the future of industry—about the lack of candidates coming forward for the vital jobs in science, technology, applied electronics, robotics and computer studies. I have visited schools up and down the country which are crying out for help, because they do not have the ability to attract men and women qualified in those subjects to teach our young men and women because teachers' pay is not good enough.

I have just returned from a visit to Stevenage. I was told that a school there could not even hope to recruit someone, even if the candidate was given a house in the area for a two or three-year free period, because that person would not be able to afford to rent or buy a house in that area on a teacher's salary. Such a candidate would be forced to go into industry, where computer and electronics companies pay half and even twice as much again.

Mr. Chris Patten: Will the hon. Gentleman give the House the benefit of his thoughts on the fact that average salaries for teachers in real terms when the Labour Government left office were £800 lower than they are today?

Mr. Sheerman: I shall return to that point later in my speech. However, I challenge the Minister's figures. I read the Minister's press release and checked his figures. I think they are completely wrong, and the teaching unions agree with me.

Mr. Patten: I bet they do.

Mr. Sheerman: Indeed they do.

Again, the Minister is deriding the teaching profession. Since I have been in the House, all I have heard from the Government has been an attack on teachers. I have mentioned teachers' pay, which does not produce teachers qualified in the right subjects at the right time and in the right place. It is a question not just of money, but of morale.

Time and again the Secretary of State for Education and Science has attacked teachers for being poor teachers, not committed to education or to the future and welfare of their pupils. That is wrong. Such attacks undermine the profession and are at the heart of the current dispute. If the Government had anything other than a desire to continue the dispute, the teachers' unions would have settled long ago. I am sure that they would have done so if the Government had governed and that had been seen to be their role.

I want to consider some of the positive aspects in the motion. Many of the things that the hon. Member for Saffron Walden mentioned are things to which the Labour party is already committed. However, when he talked about integration and coherence, he certainly touched on a subject to which so many professionals in the education world would say, "Hear, hear."

The pursuit of coherence is important to the National Association of Head Teachers, to which the hon. Member for Saffron Walden referred on several occasions. The hon. Gentleman went through the list of acronyms. He referred to TVEI, CPVE, and a host of other schemes. I hope that Conservative Members will recognise that new demands are being placed on teachers when their morale is at an all-time low.

It is not easy for teachers in the modern world, when the Government introduce many new schemes, to know that a high percentage of the young men and women in the classroom will not automatically go into employment when they leave school, as so many did in my generation. The effect of unemployment is to be seen in the schools. It has led to low morale among pupils, and their motivation has suffered. The Government have underestimated the consequences.

In a climate of massive unemployment, there are many areas where most average youngsters have no chance of obtaining a job on leaving school. In the north-west, 22·7 per cent. of youngsters at school stay on after 16 years. In the south, and in Greater London, 35·3 per cent. stay on after 16. What is the destination of young men and women who have been on the youth training scheme? In the

northern region, 41·5 per cent. of those who complete a youth training scheme join the dole queue, compared with 15·3 per cent. in the south-east. The education and training situation is desperate. Many young people throughout the country are in a state of despair. That is the real context for this debate.

The hon. Member for Saffron Walden asked, "Is 14 years too late?" I believe it is. I accept that many international observers think that our primary schools are extremely good, but, unfortunately, something goes wrong when our bright young people leave their primary schools and move into secondary education. It seems that they are turned off education. Indeed, it seems that they themselves are turned off as well. I am sometimes left in despair when I talk to youngsters. It seems that some of them have lost hope in their country, in industry, in their communities and in themselves. They have lost self-respect and self-regard while at school. Those of us who are interested in Britain's future must, irrespective of party, ascertain the causes for this despair.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury) *rose*——

Mr. Sheerman: I shall not give way now.

Something happens to our young people when they embark on secondary education. We must identify what it is and produce remedies.

The hon. Member for Saffron Walden was right when he said that youngsters with no qualifications no longer move directly into work. He rightly said that they do not move into work in many instances before they are 18. Whether the fact that there is little work for young men and women before they are 18 is a consequence of Government policy or whether it is the consequence of mounting mass youth unemployment is a question that I shall leave others to answer. I invite others to draw their own conclusions from my earlier remarks.

When the Minister had only recently taken on his new education brief, he made a speech in which he referred to young people having a wide and real choice at 16 years of age. The hon. Member for Saffron Walden put his finger on reality when he said that if real choice is to exist, a system of education maintenance allowances should be introduced as soon as possible. Unfortunately, many young people do not have a choice. They have to take part in a youth training scheme, and thereafter they have to try to find a job.

The position of many families forces youngsters to turn off the career path that would be best for them—for example, further education at a college or staying on at school. Tens of thousands of young people are having to forgo what is right for them because they need to take a small wage home to their families. In other words, they no longer have a choice. I hope that the Minister is serious when he makes speeches throughout the country on these issues. I hope also that within the Department he will argue for real choice for youngsters.

The Labour party believes in many of the principles and concepts which are espoused by the hon. Member for Saffron Walden. They are set out in manifestos and policy documents and are ready for implementation after the next general election, which seems to be more imminent as each day passes.

We believe that there is a balance between a good general education and an ability to receive an education in technical and vocational subjects or, as the hon. Member for Saffron Walden said, in practical subjects. A balance between academic, technical and vocational subjects and the workplace is a good description of a proper comprehensive education. Conservative Members have not always espoused comprehensive education, but I am delighted to hear that some of them are now accepting the proposition.

The hon. Member for Saffron Walden talked about real choice and the possibility of young men and women changing course as their careers developed, and he drew a distinction between routes and tunnels. An awful tunnel that blights our industrial and educational lives is one that stems from a percentage of the privileged opting for a different tunnel from the majority, which leads them away from the state sector——

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is the hon. Gentleman referring to Winchester?

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) is not responsible for where his parents sent him for his education. He has learnt the lesson and sent his children through the state education system. In discussing routes and tunnels, private public school education is the tunnel, and it is a blight on the education of our young men and women. It is more responsible for our poor performance in industry and in technical education than almost anything else.

The youth service has a growing importance in our society. There are about 1·25 million unemployed young men and women, and they need and deserve a better youth service than the one that was appropriate for the 1950s and 1960s. If local authorities and the Government choose to ignore that, they are living in cloud-cuckoo-land. A properly manned and resourced youth service would be a tremendous help in bringing some counsel and help to young people who are unemployed and in despair.

The Government rejected the main findings of the Thompson report, which were based on experience and participation. The rejection of putting real money into our youth service and taking it seriously has had a damaging effect on our young people. The way that the youth service has been used over the past five years has led to many missed opportunities.

I should have thought that last year, International Youth Year, would have been an opportunity to introduce a properly resourced youth service. There are many models. The Wolverhampton youth service is an example where Labour authorities are showing what can be done, even on a reduced budget.

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, a report on the funding of the youth service was recently published. One of its main findings was that 92 authorities were not spending up to their estimated expenditure on the youth service, but were diverting about £13 million into other services. Many of the most serious offenders were Labour-controlled authorities. When it comes to the allocation of funds for voluntary services, where there is a more effective use of resources, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree, the most serious offenders were again Labour-controlled authorities.

Mr. Sheerman: That is a good point, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that the figures show a mix of Labour and Conservative-controlled authorities. However, when local

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authorities, Labour-controlled in particular, are squeezed of resources by the Government, it is not surprising that sometimes their priorities for employment, regeneration and other activities have to be given precedence over the youth service. We must have some youth service resources particularly earmarked for that purpose. That is the way that we shall go when we form a Government.

If we are to be honest with millions of young people, we must debate the youth training scheme tonight. It is at a critical point. It is about to go into its extended two-year form. As the Government and Ministers know, the Opposition broadly support the extention of YTS to two years, because that is a step on the road to Labour's long-stated objective in "Learning for Life", published in 1981, and in other documents, towards a proper two-year traineeship for all young people. Trainers, educationists, and employers who are trying to make these schemes work deserve our help, encouragement and congratulations. We also support the closer regulation of managing agents and the work being done on the accreditation of YTS.

There is truth and fiction in this matter. The Prime Minister is fond of talking about truth and fiction and about how much stranger truth is than fiction, so I shall develop that theme. The truth is that those working valiantly in YTS are shackled in their efforts by the effects of five fictions.

The first fiction is that the Government have made extra resources available for the two-year YTS. The truth is that no more will be spent on the two-year programme when fully operational than the £1 billion promised in 1983 for the one-year scheme. That is training on the cheap, and the result is catastrophic. There is inadequate off-the-job training—only 20 weeks over the two-year period, when the TUC and educators wanted 26 weeks. It means overall lower training qualities than we need and want. It also means a great shortfall in the premium places and an allowance that is too low, by anyone's reckoning, by about £500 a year for each trainee.

The second fiction is that the Government have created in YTS a high-quality skills training programme. At one time, Lord Young wanted to call it the skills training programme rather than the youth training scheme. The truth is that most YTS places are fairly low-quality work experience. We must move on from that, but we cannot do it without cash. It is also true that high-quality apprenticeship type training has been halved since 1979. The new funding arrangements will force many YTS employers to hire out their trainees on the cheap to get the income to make up for the funding deficiencies. That is a recipe for the exploitation and alienation of our young people.

The third fiction is that the new premium places are a proper successor to the mode B schemes—the generally high-quality schemes aimed particularly at disadvantaged youngsters. The truth is that the two-year YTS makes the premium places a ghetto for the disadvantaged. Trainees will have to be vetted first by the careers service. We understand that after 1 April disadvantaged youngsters with a handicap, whether they come from a history of trouble in the courts or of absenteeism in the schools, will have to be on special schemes on their own. They will not be integrated with their peers, but will be in ghettos for the disadvantaged. That is wrong. I hope that if I am wrong, the Minister will clear up that point later.

The effects on the career service will be bad. Members of the executive of the Institute of Careers Officers came to see me about this. They are extremely worried. They feel that the scheme will turn our education and youth training schemes into ghettos for such young people. The careers service is——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his own speech.

The careers service is terribly overstretched. I understand that a previous Minister in the Department of Employment seriously considered abolishing the careers service. Thank heaven, that lunacy was avoided. The careers service needs to be expanded and better resourced soon. I am sure that the hon. Member for Saffron Walden will agree with me on that. The reduction of places on mode B schemes has led to the reality that 70,000 places have slipped to 40,000, and new funding arrangements are driving schemes out of operation. Others are being forced into unsuitable survival mergers, and experienced trainers are being forced on to the dole.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Sheerman: I shall not give way.

When the previous reduction from 90,000 to 70,000 was announced, there were assurances that that would be the bottom line.

The fourth fiction that the Government are putting about is that there are jobs and a great future at the end of YTS. That is not so. One cannot build an education and training policy in an environment of mass unemployment for young people. Some 100,000 trainees a year—30 per cent.—graduate straight on to the dole. In all, 1·25 million young people are on the dole and 500,000 have been unemployed for more than six months. Unemployment in the economy as a whole is increasing year after year under a Government who have run out of ideas, out of steam and very nearly out of Ministers.

I hope that the Minister will listen particularly to this item. The Government are failing, in particular, YTS entrants from April to September 1985. They cannot look to the two-year YTS, but they also cannot look to the late, unlamented, young workers scheme, which bribed employers by allowing them to give low wages to young people. That section will get nothing by way of help into employment. Those entrants will be more disadvantaged in seeking employment than any other group over the past 10 years.

The last fiction is the richest of all. It is the fiction that is in some ways the most hurtful to many young men and women on YTS. I spoke to some of them last week. It is surprising that the Manpower Services Commission should be so out of touch that it decided that models and actors should be hired to pose as YTS trainees in the £4 million advertising campaign.

Mr. Chris Patten: That is a trivial point.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister says it is a trivial point. That shows how completely out of touch he is with young people aged 16 and 17. Many of them are bitter and angry. Instead of taking some of the 350,000 YTS trainees and using them for the advertisement, Saatchi and Saatchi hired models. Fifteen-year-old Tracy Logan is not a YTS trainee. It is not for her, she says. She was also paid more for an hour's work than a YTS trainee gets in a week. It

was a disgrace, but what else could one expect from an advertising agency, such as Saatchi and Saatchi, which is so closely linked to the Conservative party?

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman is scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Mr. Sheerman: The House will remember that during the 1979 general election campaign the Conservative party said "Labour is not working." Saatchi and Saatchi showed people queueing up for jobs. But it did not find unemployed people and pay them to do the job; it got actors and members of the staff of Saatchi and Saatchi to do it. Surely that could have been avoided. It was an insult to the YTS trainees. For an hour's work, Tracy Logan was paid as much as YTS trainees get in a week.

Education and training in this country are at a critical point. YTS, the expansion and development of the curriculum and the changing nature of further education are in the melting pot. The adversity of high unemployment provides us with the opportunity to make urgently needed changes. This opportunity is unparalleled since the introduction nearly 100 years ago of universal schooling. We could be laying the foundations for a wonderful work force in the 21st century. This is Industry Year. However, for unemployed young people as well as for other unemployed people in this country the idea that we are tackling this problem must not turn out to be a fiction. The advertising agencies must not put out the fiction that Industry Year is wonderful and will be the answer to all the problems of unemployment. It must be more than that.

Education and training must do something about getting this country back to work again. None of the policies mentioned by the hon. Member for Saffron Walden or by the Minister of State will work unless there are jobs. Jobs come first. I hope that there will be a real commitment to backing British industry, British Leyland and other British companies and to allowing local authorities to spend money, thereby creating work.

I hope that the Government will see the folly of their ways and that Ministers will say in this debate that they take on board the unanimous, all-party recommendations on long-term unemployment that were made last week by the Select Committee on Employment. Measures that would relieve long-term unemployment would have a knock-on effect upon teachers and pupils. If the morale of those who work in the system can be lifted, there will be some hope for education and training in this country.

5.14 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I join in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) upon using his success in the ballot to raise this extremely important subject.

I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). He attacked the public school system but there has been no confirmation from the Opposition Front Bench that the policy of the Labour party is to destroy the public school system, which would lead to chaos in the teaching profession. The hon. Gentleman then attacked the youth training scheme without saying a single word about the Labour party's policy on replacing YTS, which is under such critical fire.

This debate should deal with the constructive efforts that can be made to deal with the problems that exist in our society and should concentrate upon the direction which education ought to take during the last quarter of this century. We could spend the whole evening griping about this, that or the other, or griping about the problems caused by the teachers' strike, but it is far more important for the House to direct its thoughts to how best to achieve this country's objectives through our education system being geared to the needs and requirements of our changing society.

Unemployment will be a major factor until the end of this century, and probably beyond it. Unemployment is not a problem for this country alone. It affects Europe and other nations. However, unemployment places a huge responsibility upon education to try to solve the problem of unemployment.

The pattern of our society is changing. People's working lives will be shorter. They will not start work at 18 and continue in work until they are 65. That philosophy will not see us through to the end of this centurty. Young people must be educated to recognise that there will be a change in the pattern of their working lives. They must also be educated to use their leisure time. With a shorter working life, people will have much more leisure. Furthermore, during their working lives people will have an increasing amount of leisure. That is good, but we must ensure that they are able to enjoy themselves both while they are working and after they have retired. Education must ensure that people are educated to use their leisure time productively. In the 1960s it was normal to have two weeks of holiday each year. That has been increased to between five and six weeks a year. By the end of the century it will have increased considerably beyond that.

I pay tribute to the way in which the teaching profession has helped young people to understand the kind of careers that are available to them. It has instilled in them the desire to be enterprising and to be the "doers" of this world. That is a broad statement. However, the teaching profession has provided this country with a generation of young people who are every bit as good as any previous generation. They are probably better than any previous generation. I am speaking almost like an old man who is looking at the generation that will take over from us. The young people of today have an immense fund of talent. That is due to their education in the last few decades. A great deal more must be done. Many have not had the education to give them the tools to provide them with a job. People are still coming out of schools unable to read or write properly. We must recognise that and take steps to improve it.

The technological revolution that is taking place creates many challenges. There is a shift in emphasis towards the high-tech industries in the United States, Japan and South Korea. How are we to grapple with the problems that will emerge from the growth of those industries in those countries which are taking the markets that we must prepare ourselves to obtain? We can do that only by being a fully-fledged member of Europe, working in concert with our European partners. To do that we must provide the scientists, technicians and engineers to generate those industries, not just in Britain but in Europe.

Therefore, it is of immense importance that we give the fullest possible assistance and emphasis to ensuring that our universities, colleges and schools have the resources to provide the scientists and technicians for the scientific advances that will be necessary if we are to maintain our position as a country with a high-tech industry base.

[Mr. Robert Banks]

On a lower level, it is important that our connections with industry should be improved. We need to overhaul the structure of education in so far as it is related to industry and commerce. In commerce, I include the service sector because that is a growth area if ever there was one. There may be as many as 350,000 jobs in that sector in the next five years. We must improve the quality of the services that are available to tourists from home and abroad.

It is of immense importance that we see a dovetail arrangement between education, industry and commerce. I do not deny that some connections exist, but they are only a fraction of what is necessary. If a person is to fulfil himself he must have an understanding of what sort of career he wants to take up. That is never an easy process. Some may have an instant desire to be a doctor or to enter a manufacturing company, but the great majority of people do not have the full range of options presented to them. It is through the close connection of industry and education that young people will be able to develop a better idea of the career that they want to take up.

On the other hand, industry, through its connection with education, will have the opportunity to play a part in the school curriculum to ensure that education gives people what industries need. That is immensely important because, even with 3·5 million people unemployed, we suffer from a shortage of people with certain skills; in many cases, basic skills. I am amazed that my constituency has a 9 per cent. unemployment rate—a large figure. I say "large" because the jobcentre has between 400 and 500 jobs or work opportunities and my local paper is full of advertisements for a range of jobs — skilled, semi-skilled, managerial and manual. Something is hugely wrong. Education must ensure that it plays its part in getting closer to local industry and, vice versa, industry must get closer to schools.

Frankly, paying people in industry to go into schools and give a lecture on their products and how their factory operates is not the whole answer. I am against that. It is better to appeal to a person's better nature so that they are doing something because they want to contribute towards the future success of not only their company but the next generation. That is a worthy thing to do. If someone is paid to do that, everybody knows it, and that is not the same as wanting to impart information through a desire to be of assistance.

Much more needs to be done. If the Government, in Industry Year, are to make a contribution to industry, the best measure of all would be to give education full recognition for what it needs to do to bridge the gap between education and industry.

5.25 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) on introducing the motion this afternoon because it gives us an opportunity to debate a matter which lies at the heart of Britain's decline. The way in which hon. Members have forcefully put points on the changes that can and should be made should not be lost on those Ministers who are present.

Britain's existing and potential work force suffers from a lack of training and proper skills and the crisis that we are suffering is enormous. It is that part of the education system which is most urgently in need of reform. I do not for one minute want to suggest that there are not other parts of the education system that need change and reform but it is among the 14 to 19-year-olds that the urgency of the crisis is felt so dramatically.

There is a crisis in two senses. Young people are often unemployed, untrained and lack any sense of clear purpose about their future. The social results of that condition are becoming daily apparent to everybody — apathy, alienation, irresponsibility and civil unrest.

There is also a crisis for the national economy. Statistics obtained from the Library for just three of our competitors show how bad our training and skill opportunities are. For example, in the United States 78 per cent. of the civilian labour force have some form of high school diploma. In Germany 66 per cent. of the labour force have a form of vocational qualification. In Japan 60 per cent. have a school diploma. The best that the United Kingdom can do is to have 50 per cent of its working population with one CSE pass. The figures speak for themselves in showing the size of the problem we face. I am sure that the Minister does not need me nor any other hon. Member to tell him and his colleagues about the size of the problem.

Two things need to be done. One is the sharp shock treatment which the Government seem to be favouring in other areas of their policy, and the other is a longer-term look at the situation. Action needs to be taken immediately. We must effect proposals to bring immediate change by way of a crash programme and to provide a comprehensive and coherent framework for the education and training of the entire age group.

That major reform may well take a number of years to achieve. It would be impossible for any party to gamble with people's futures and suggest that the matter can be solved overnight or in a few years. It cannot. It will take as long to cure as it has taken to create if we are to do it properly. But we must use fast and effective measures at least to start making amends for the catastrophe that we now face.

The alliance—I speak on behalf of the SDP and the Liberal party—is convinced that the great majority——

Mr. Pawsey: They are not here.

Mr. Hancock: My colleagues are in the same place as the colleagues of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). It is important not to score points as to which hon. Members are present, but to consider the way in which we can combat our problems. Scoring silly political points might do the hon. Gentleman's ego good, but it certainly will not commend us to the people about whose problems we should talk responsibly.

The alliance aims to give the great majority of young people the opportunity to undertake full-time or part-time education and training. If the policies of the alliance are pursued and a crash programme is implemented, young people will have the opportunity to gain money and experience in the world of work. They will have a choice between different career paths and will be able to afford to choose. They will work within an integrated and flexible qualifications system. Our proposals for reform flow directly from those aims.

The proposals in the crash programme will be steps on the way towards a realisation of long-term proposals. The

first step must be to recognise that the link between education and training is indivisible. It is damaging to categorise youngsters into groups because, invariably, it means that many do not fulfil their potential. The fundamental steps must be to combine the Department of Education and Science with the Manpower Services Commission. At present, there is an overlap between the two, jealousy, unnecessary competition and lack of co-ordination. A combined education, science and training Department would, in the eyes of the alliance, result in wide decentralisation with local authorities playing a key role. The Minister of State referred to that key role. It is important for local authorities to give a push to a project to provide more opportunities for more people.

The purpose of our programme should be to produce in as short a period as possible a turnround in the numbers entering courses and qualifying at all levels. The courses should be relevant to the skill shortages in specific areas. The Secretary of State is likely to be frustrated in his attempts to increase the number of engineering degree students because not enough people are qualified to take up the extra places. The alliance's programme would concentrate on pre-degree courses leading directly to entry to higher education or to technician or craft-level courses. We would start immediately, using existing institutions and training mechanisms which would, in the end, be integrated into long-term programmes.

Much would have to be done to achieve our aims. We would need money and a Government committed to spending it on education and training, not merely to talking about it. The sum of £200 million for each year of the programme, which might run to three or four years, would have to be provided if it was to be seen to work. We would need a joint team from the Department of Education and Science and the MSC to conduct the programme. That team would assess the bids and stimulate the proposals that would fulfil certain criteria. I ask the Minister to consider those criteria seriously. They include increasing the numbers on courses in skill shortage areas, increasing the number of likely applicants to fill higher education shortage areas and boosting basic skills, which would result in people able to fit the first two categories. Priority would be given to courses in high unemployment areas.

Funding could be given through subsidies to fund additional apprenticeships and bursaries for students returning to full-time study or relevant courses after a year or two in employment, on YTS, or even on the dole. When I was responsible for apprentice training in one of the factories where I worked, the company missed many opportunities because it was not prepared to invest sufficient money in training its workforce. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) referred to the cost of machinery lying idle while people were being trained. Proper investment in a proper apprenticeship scheme would have saved that company from incurring losses. The apprentices would have learned from day one what was necessary to perfect the skills they would undoubtedly need for new technology and existing practices.

Funding could be given also to special programmes to enable people to return to education rather than sign on for the dole. Funding of training courses could provide the necessary teachers and trainers. We often talk about training people, but do not provide proper training for the trainers. This results in sub-standard training in an attempt to convince ourselves that we are training people for the future. In the short term, we have only invested money in people who are inappropriately trained to pass on their skills and expertise.

The crash programme would, by its nature, concentrate on limited objectives in trying to solve a short-term problem. We must reform the whole system if we are to cope with long-term problems. Young people in the 16 to 19-year-old group fall into four categories — the employed, the majority of whom have no training and a minority of whom are released for daytime study; those in full-time education; those who are on Government training schemes—mainly YTS; and the unemployed.

The cardinal aim of any long-term change in policy must be to make it possible for people in the last category to join the first three. Our proposals are directed towards enhancing access to and the quality of education and training for the first three groups.

Often the alliance is criticised for not having policies relating to the needs of the people, but on training, as in so many respects, our policies have been well thought out and well costed. They aim to meet the needs of existing communities and future needs. We believe that there should be a legal obligation on all employers of 16 and 17-year-olds to release them for education and training for two days a week, or its equivalent. If necessary, such an obligation on the employer could be matched by a contract of employment which obligates the employee to attend such courses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): Is that idea meant to be appropriate to small businesses? Would they be required to allow some of their employees to be absent for two days a week?

Mr. Hancock: Small businesses and large companies must accept the obligations. Many small businesses have enjoyed the facilities of YTS and the skills of those people lucky enough to be given proper training. It is no good absolving a company from responsibility on the grounds of it being a large or a small company. This must be seen to be a fair and equitable measure across the board. If it causes problems for some companies, we would hope that resources would be found to provide not only training and expertise but to allow the company to give employees that time off. That is why I referred to the need for money. This picks up the point made by the hon. Member for Langbaurgh about the cost incurred when the machines were not operating.

Mr. Holt: Is it alliance policy to direct firms to take people on? Many small firms will not take on people if legislation to this effect is introduced. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I said earlier, he would have heard me say that the capital cost of major plant is such that it must be kept in operation for 24 hours a day and is therefore not available for training. I think that the hon. Gentleman missed the point.

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is rather pessimistic. If the scheme is properly funded and brought into operation, those points can be covered. It would be absurd to suggest that small businesses can cope with the absence of two or three trainees for two days a week or with machinery lying idle for longer periods. If the scheme is put together correctly and is properly funded and planned—in contrast to the ad hoc approach at present

[Mr. Hancock]

—it could work. The pessimism of hon. Members has led many small employers to feel reluctant about embracing schemes of mutual benefit to the whole nation.

We must first recognise the imperfections of our training and try to develop it and encourage small business men to participate. We will get nowhere all the time we place obstacles in the way of a solution. I hope that hon. Members will try to develop a better understanding of training and encourage employers to look more favourably at such proposals.

I hope that there will be major improvements in the youth training scheme and an increase in off-the-job training to the equivalent of two days a week. We should welcome the expansion of information technology centres.

The Government should support a shared starter-job scheme as an alternative to my first and second proposals. They should show that support in those areas where they are directly responsible for employment and training. They would be jobs rather than training schemes. The starting salary could be split between two young people. They would each work half a week and receive training during the other half. The Government should cover the cost of the training and the additional employment cost. The cost would not be as much as is sometimes paid out in benefits now. Employers and the nation would benefit.

There should be a young student grant paid directly to full-time students aged 16 to 19 years. That could be paid to all students or means tested fairly according to the family's income. Child allowance would continue to be paid to the parents and the young student grant would be the difference between the child allowance and supplementary benefit. If the Government were prepared to accept that proposal, an impediment towards getting things moving could be removed.

Mr. Pawsey *rose*—

Mr. Hancock: I must continue. Other hon. Members wish to speak and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have ample opportunity to make whatever political points he wants.

In addition, a young returners grant could be paid to students returning to full-time education after a year or more on the YTS, in employment or unemployment. It would be aimed at boosting the number of part-time craft and technical courses which should increasingly take the place of apprenticeship.

Grants should be paid to those young people with the motive and ability to benefit. They should be means tested according to individual, not family income.

All those proposals will cost money. It is no good us congratulating the hon. Member for Saffron Walden on bringing the issue before the House. We should all be prepared to tell the nation that there will be a price to be paid. If we do not pay that price, the circumstances I quoted earlier will continue. We shall be putting our heads in the sand and hoping that the problem will go away. Our experience over the past 10 years tells us that the problem will not go away. It will worsen. Those hon. Members who have tried to score cheap political points should not suggest that my proposals provide no answer to the problem. The proposals could benefit us in the future.

Mr. Chris Patten: I do not wish to make a cheap political point, but how much will those proposals cost?

Mr. Hancock: They would be expensive. The crash starter scheme programme would cost £200 million a year on present costings. The long-term proposals would be extremely expensive.

Mr. Patten: How much?

Mr. Hancock: Will the Minister tell us how much is being spent on youth unemployment benefit and other payments, when he replies? The two figures would not be significantly different. We should decide whether we are prepared to pay the price of doing nothing, or pay what I suggest is not significantly different from what we are paying now. Failure to implement my proposals will mean that debates such as this are no more than words.

I am sure that the unemployed are sick to death of hearing people talk about the problem. They want to see action. They want an opportunity to obtain the skills and training which will put them into the jobs that the Minister and his colleagues are keen to tell the House are available if people put their minds to obtaining them.

We all know that without training and expertise, youngsters will never be able to fill those posts. Employers will be unable to create more jobs unless the Government and local authorities are prepared to work together to create jobs and make the atmosphere for job creation a damned sight more attractive than it is at present.

5.45 pm

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) said. I noted carefully that he was speaking on behalf of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties. I should, however, be interested to know what is the detailed cost of his proposals. It was not good enough to say that the reasoned objections and questions from Members on this side of the House were cheap political points and to dismiss them. He sought to produce a reasoned argument and it was right for him to be asked what the proposals would cost. I was disappointed with his answer to my hon. Friend the Minister of State.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned apprentices. I am sure that he would agree that part of our problem is that in the United Kingdom apprentices are paid about 60 per cent. of a skilled man's rate. In West Germany, the equivalent figure is 20 per cent. He might agree that that is the principal reason why we have fewer apprentices than West Germany.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is not in his place. He referred to the teachers' dispute. He sought to make what seemed to be a genuinely political point on pay. I was disappointed but not surprised that he did not recognise the importance of my right hon. Friend's package of £1·25 billion which has been obtained from the Treasury for teachers' pay. I was also disappointed that he did not respond to my hon. Friend the Minister's challenge when he said that teachers' pay is now about £800 per annum more when compared with the pay they received when his party was in power.

I add my congratulations to those already heaped upon the head of my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) on his good fortune and on selecting such an admirable motion. In this, as in most things, it is important to come first. I do not feel any sour grapes even though I drew motion No. 3.

Had I been successful, my motion would have referred to the south Warwickshire coalfield and would have

outlined my anxiety about it and the way in which it will affect the environment of my constituency. Nevertheless, I freely acknowledge the importance of this motion. Education for 14 to 19-year-olds is most important. I shall paraphrase George Orwell: whilst all education is important, some parts perhaps are more important than others.

The National Association of Head Teachers report has been mentioned and has much to commend it. There should be a freer and easier exchange between education and industry — between the schools and colleges and industry. Currently, it is fashionable to talk about flexible retirement. We should be discussing flexible school leaving with early leaving being tied closely to effective training. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend refer to the technical and vocational education initiative. I should like to see greater use made of centres of excellence. They are often seen as being only for the academic but there is no reason why that should be the case. They could equally be used to concentrate the best technical minds.

Those who would not find their way to such centres could remain in the school environment for their secondary education. It often happens, however, that children are taught in what seems to be an educational vacuum, where the outside world scarcely impinges upon the work carried out in the classroom and where study has little discernible relevance to a future job. Learning for learning's sake is always to be commended, but what may be of greater value is education which prepares young people for industry and commerce. After all, that is where the majority of our young people will earn their living. We should not be ashamed to say that we educate our children for work, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden on the use of that phrase. It is one which obviously has particular relevance to this debate. I believe, as I am sure he does, that the syllabus should have a greater relevance to the job market.

Another point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden was that this is Industry Year and it was noteworthy that he referred specifically to that in his motion. This specially designated year sets out to bridge the still considerable gap between school and industry. Much useful work is being done and the breadth of imagination that is being displayed by some schools and companies is worthwhile. This year might be the launch pad, but it is important that the impetus should be maintained next year and the years after. One of our aims, therefore, should be to reforge the link between education and industry. In the past, at least to some extent, that was performed by the technical schools. In those schools and their sister institutions, the technical colleges, education was provided which had a particular bias towards the type of industry in a particular area. For example, in Coventry education was directed towards the automobile industry whereas in Bradford it was directed towards textiles.

Even some of the teachers and lecturers in those schools and colleges had a practical experience of a specific industry. That was of substantial benefit to the young people in the schools and colleges because the teachers brought with them knowledge of the shop floor and the workplace. These days, those who teach often have limited experience of business and industry, having gone from school to college and back to school again. It is no wonder that some teachers are a little uncertain about industry. It is no wonder that when our young people leave school they often regard industry as a last resort. It sometimes seems to be a daunting and strange place.

It is unfortunate that after 11 years, or thereabouts, of full-time education so many of our young people are ill-equipped for what is expected of them. Since the experience of many teachers is confined to school and college it can be no surprise when they promote, probably unintentionally, the professions because they understand the professions better than industry, with its emphasis on skills, management and profit. Therefore, it seems that there is a need for a shift in teacher training so that teachers are more exposed to the demands of the factory and the office and have a better understanding of the requirements of modern business. The syllabus and the ethos of teacher-training colleges should reflect a greater understanding of the needs of industry.

I have referred to centres of excellence. The selective schools, both grammar and technical, did much good. It is significant that the selective system has been maintained in such differing countries as France, Germany and the Soviet Union. One of the paradoxes to which I have referred on previous occasions in the House is that, despite doubling the money spent on education, standards have not significantly improved. That point has been hammered home by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) and I am delighted to see him in his place on the Front Bench. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) has also referred to that point, and he was justified in so doing.

I have referred to Northern Ireland where examination results have shown a dramatic improvement when compared with those of England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Nonsense.

Mr. Pawsey: With respect, the hon. Gentleman should see the figures. If he saw and understood them, he would have difficulty in refuting my point about Northern Ireland and the type of education now enjoyed in the Province.

Northern Ireland is the only place in the United Kingdom which has maintained a selective system and I would argue that Northern Ireland would be an admirable benchmark for the rest of the United Kingdom against which the present system might be judged. I shall paraphrase a former Member of the House when I say, "Why look into the crystal ball when one can read the examination results?"

Earlier I argued for an easier movement of young people between industry, college and school, but I believe that that should be founded on the bedrock of school stability. That is often best provided by the maintenance of sixth forms within the established fabric of schools. I am convinced that the sixth form does a great deal for the individual and the school which retains that system.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Hear, hear.

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend the parliamentary private secretary agreeing with me. I am certain that I am not embarrassing my hon. Friend in any way, but if I am I shall withdraw my earlier remark!

Certainly the sixth form promotes a sense of responsibility and significantly, where colleges of further education exist alongside schools with sixth forms, the majority of pupils elect to stay within the school

[Mr. Pawsey]

framework rather than transfer to the greater freedom of the college. In many cases, young people of 16 are not ready for college and prefer the continuity and discipline of school. I was particularly interested to hear my hon. Friend the Minister of State say that no system of tertiary education would be imposed. Clearly, as he said, there is a place for variety and choice within the education system.

Schools would benefit from having greater control over ther own budgets. Governing bodies and heads would have more freedom and responsibility to decide on the syllabus within their own school. I suspect that that would lead to a more relevant form of education, particularly if it was allied to a method which made it easier for parents to choose between schools. This is not a debate on the voucher, but I believe that more choice for parents would put greater pressure on schools to provide the type of education and discipline that would best give young people a chance of getting a worthwhile job.

I welcome the GCSE, but I realise that not all children will derive benefit from it. Those who are less suited to academic education should be provided with real and worthwhile training in relevant skills. If languages or physics are genuinely of little interest to a specific pupil, why not then concentrate on bringing out the strength of that pupil? That, in turn, will develop the confidence which comes with an appreciation of skills. It is better to do that than to develop a sense of inadequacy through repeated failures.

The problems in education have been visible for years. We should remember that the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) called for a great debate 10 years ago. Ten years ago, it was recognised that all was not well. Education was not and, I fear, is not up to parents' expectations. The education system has not delivered the goods.

The battery of measures that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has introduced during his tenure of office, particularly on teacher appraisal, will undoubtedly help. I hope that the common sense that has been exhibited by my right hon. Friend will be recognised by teachers and by parents. Surely it is right that the good, conscientious teacher — thank God that they are in the majority — should be adequately rewarded and that professional pride be restored.

I conclude by repeating a point I made when we last debated education. In 1976, the performance did not match the rhetoric. For the sake of our children and their future—and the nation's future—I hope that that will not be the case in 1986.

6 pm

Mr. John Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): The Government are very good at one thing, and that is demolition. Indeed, when the Prime Minister is finally driven out by the wolves, or perhaps the sheep, I believe that she will turn her back on south-east London and make for the north. I can see her now, running amok, blowing up chimney stacks, with the light shining in her eyes, because this is a Government of demolition experts.

The Government are good at demolition, but they are useless at building. Nowhere is that seen to be more true than in training. They have smashed what was and put too little in its place, except for the 16 and 17-years-olds. As Parliamentary Under-Secretary, I was responsible for training in the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), and it was not an easy job. Training does not arouse much emotion, interest or concern, unlike unemployment, with which I also had to deal. The staff engaged on training were the least effective in the Manpower Services Commission because they did not have the right background. The industrial training boards were far better, but there were one or two bad ones. Many employers at local level just did not want to train, and there were even trade unionists whose love of tradition and rules stemming from antiquity would have qualified them for your distinguished office, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Those of us who wanted improvement constantly sought changes, trying to harmonise the MSC and the industrial training boards, trying to ensure that training met actual need at both local and industrial level, trying to ensure that both the quality and quantity of training were correct and, most difficult of all, trying to ensure that the arrangements for payment for training were equitable. We tried, and we tried hard, but it was a hard, slow process. It had to be because we were dealing with people who had a lot of pride in their current arrangements and a lot of prejudice, too. When one deals with people's pride and prejudice, one needs to be cautious, careful and considerate while persuading them to change. It was a slow job, which we did not finish before the general election.

Then came the so-called Tory radicals. Like most revolutionaries, they acted on the presumption that all one has to do is smash what exists and everything will be all right for ever more. The revolution, in itself, will bring forth the natural goodness of people, by making them free. That was the Tory revolutionary doctrine.

As I listened to Tory Ministers spouting after their 1979 victory, I was reminded of Russian Communist propaganda films that I watched and laughed at as a boy. So I laughed somewhat bitterly when I was told by Tory Employment Ministers that, after the smashing of much of the industrial training boards system, voluntary arrangements would herald a new dawn. Freedom, self-help and individual initiative are to be encouraged, of course, but one cannot rely on them alone in training. Sometimes one needs rules, discipline and compulsion to make people behave properly towards one another and society as a whole. My experience tells me that in training one needs rules that can be enforced. However, Tory Employment Ministers have acted like parents who have placed too much faith in the teachings of Dr. Spock and then acted unreasonably, angrily and bitterly because their offspring have failed to turn out like the book. They have gone from over-indulgence to becoming screaming, gibbering wrecks in no time at all.

Ministers took away the statutory obligation to train. Now they are running from one dinner to another, pouring out press releases as they go, being critical of the employers' lack of training facilities.

Mr. Holt: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there never was a statutory obligation to train? There was a statutory obligation to pay for training, and many people never did any training at all.

Mr. Golding: I accept that correction, but the training took place, and taking away the statutory obligation to pay has taken away the training itself in many instances.

Let us return to the preaching. My advice to Ministers is that there is no point in that preaching. They should save their breath, and, at those dinners, give their puddings time to settle rather than make those useless speeches. The employers' attitude is quite clear. According to the old rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but press releases never hurt me." The press department in the Department of Employment should recognise that.

In any case, press releases do not tell the shareholders that companies are not spending money on training which is not immediately necessary to maintain a firm's profits. The nub of the problem of training is this. It does not necessarily pay an individual firm to spend money on training. We must emphasise that. It is no use telling a firm that it is in its interests to train when the accountants say that it is not. It is cheaper to poach. One can pay higher dividends to shareholders if one ignores the needs of the next decade. That is regrettable and I represent work people who desperately need training and retraining. In private industry investment in machines shows up on the balance sheet, and investment in people does not. That is something that Ministers must come to understand.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Golding: The hon. Gentleman is an old friend of mine. I relied on his interventions in the Committee on the British Telecommunications Bill to carry me on for months. He is entitled, after two minutes in the Chamber, to make a three-minute intervention in my speech, but I say this first. There is a conflict between the interests of existing shareholders and the needs of the country's industry and work people.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman was obviously deep in his notes earlier on when I was previously in the Chamber. However, I am grateful to him for giving way. The hon. Gentleman seeks to represent one of our largest and most important private industries. Is that private industry—I am sure that he is dying to tell us anyhow—doing sufficient training at the moment?

Mr. Golding: The answer is no, but I had not intended to make an election speech this evening.

I believe that a company's obligation to its shareholders means that we must have a wide basis of statutory obligation — the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) would say for payment—backed by a system of payment that is fair to employers and taxpayers. Without statutory obligation, the needs of the young will be neglected, the need for training and retraining older workers to avoid redundancy and unemployment will be ignored and the development of individual potential will be neglected. I emphasise, as I always wish to do in debates on training, that training is not only for the needs of employers, but for the needs of individuals so that their potential can be fully developed. Without a statutory obligation, the whole future of our manufacturing and industrial society will be put at risk.

The only answer to the question "What shall we do when the oil money runs out?" is that we must rely on the tremendous talent and abilities of the British people. That answer will carry no conviction if the Government carry on with their present policy of depriving industrial training of its rightful place in society.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) on his foresight in bringing forward the motion today.

6.12 pm

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): One problem with following such a constructive and farsighted speech as that by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) is that the ideas in my speech that seemed innovative when I wrote it earlier suddenly do not look so original. Although I agree with my hon. Friend on many matters, one of his most telling comments was that a great success of the Government has been their policies on education and training. We have generated a whole change of attitude that has enabled an end to be seen to an underqualified and underdeveloped work force that has led to an underpaid and an underemployed work force.

We have seen changes in the attitude of employers, who recognise that investment in people is necessary and that they must train if they are to compete and to produce innovative products and if their growth is not to be restricted by skill shortages.

We have seen a change of attitude by unions, who recognise that a lower wage does not necessarily equate to slave labour or pose a threat to adult members of the unions, but is simply a reflection of the costs of an employer's investment in people.

Young people have changed their attitudes. They recognise that they are not qualified to seek proper work at 16 years of age. They are prepared to defer immediate earnings for enhanced prospects and greater rewards later.

The Government and those three constituents have accepted the need for change, but there is still much to achieve. We must not sit back. We must go on to achieve more. Young people need better preparation to know what they want from life and career. We must identify skill shortages and produce schemes to overcome them. We must co-ordinate school and workplace qualifications. Industry must spend more than the average 0·5 per cent. that it spends now on training to reach a figure closer to the 3 per cent. on average spent by our competitors. We must provide post-YTS provision and above all we must rid the youth training scheme of the stigma that it is only for the unemployed. As long as it is seen by young people as the second-best option, it will never have the credibility and respect that it deserves.

We are now providing the paths that lead from school to industry. However, young people wish to be advised about which path to take. Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Saffron Walden, have raised that point. I pay tribute to careers staff who do magnificent work at a difficult time. But careers advice to young people in our schools is wholly inadequate. Staff are expected to know everything. They have to advise young people who want to be bus drivers and those who want to be astronauts, those who want to be hairdressers and those who want to become Members of Parliament, God help them. They are backed up by out-of-date and unattractive material.

The careers service needs a shake-up. It must be better resourced, but we must also specialise and concentrate the advice in centres, so that people can, for example, watch attractive videos showing what training is needed or what is involved in each career. Specialist careers advisers are needed for those centres to advise on their special subjects.

[Mr. Geoff Lawler]

If a young person wishes to become a bank manager, he could go to the specialist who knows how banks work and what training and qualifications are needed.

Those materials and advisers should be made available to people from the age of 13 and 14, so that they can map out their future at an early stage. Otherwise, we shall continue with the current system in which careers advice in many schools means that the bright are shoved in the direction of university and college and the not so bright must fend for themselves.

We must open up wider horizons for young people in schools, so that they can appreciate the opportunities available to them other than those into which they are traditionally channelled because of what their parents do or the type of community in which they are brought up. They should be shown at an early age what core subjects they should take to provide them with the career that they want.

In the inner cities especially, we need to provide young people with hope through careers advice. From the early age of 12 or 13, they see little point in being diligent at school and in choosing career paths, because those openings are not available to them. I recently visited a school in a part of my constituency which has a male unemployment rate of 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. We must ensure that careers teachers and advisers can counter that problem by showing children that making the right choices can push them in the right direction and enhance their chances of success. We must not allow young people of 13 to 15 to despair or become disillusioned. They must see that there is hope and opportunity for them.

The careers service should be shaken up. We should scrap the post of careers teachers. By all means, have a link person in schools, but all the careers service should be concentrated under one roof. Specialist centres should be opened, so that existing resources are concentrated instead of being spread thinly.

We must encourage careers teachers to rid schoolchildren of the idea that when they leave school at 16 they are ready for work. We must ensure that 16-year-olds realise that they must continue with further education and training before they are suitable for employment.

Links between colleges and industry are a great help. I am especially pleased that Bradford, with two thirds of its schools linked with industry, is above the average for cities.

We must ensure that colleges and the courses that they run are flexible to industry's demands. As hon. Members have mentioned, colleges must be properly equipped with the machinery to train people to provide the skills that industry needs. One way to help is to allow companies' donations to educational institutions in the form of equipment or cash to be offset against taxation, in an effort to free more resources for colleges.

Through local consortia and chambers of commerce, we must identify skill shortages. My city is in the ludicrous position that 40 per cent. of the long-term vacancies are still vacant because training is needed. The local consortia could suggest opportunities for business, because they could identify goods that could and should be produced by local businesses and help to train people for those opportunities.

From secondary school onwards, we must prepare young people in a way that allows them to make the maximum use of their time. Even the middle schools, with children aged between nine and 13, should be linked with the upper schools and we must co-ordinate pre-school leaving and post-school leaving qualifications, so that we end the situation in which many people discover, on reaching adulthood, that the exams that they took at school were irrelevant.

We must ensure that the time spent studying for GCSE or CPVE is useful for career progression and can be further developed during post-school training to gain a final work-based qualification.

If we are to ensure that the advantages of all the changes that we are seeing in education and in training and all the advantages of going on a youth training scheme are not wasted, we must ask, "What happens after YTS?" Fortunately, more and more companies are becoming farsighted enough to incorporate the YTS into their existing training schemes; the electrical contractors are a shining example of that.

Already, 38 per cent. of those who go on the YTS and get jobs go into placements offering higher levels and longer periods of training. However, despite all the guidance and the training, some will remain unemployed. We must ensure that that is not the end of the line for them and that they do not feel that they have been forgotten. We can add to the credibility of and respect for the YTS by ensuring that there is something at the end of it. The most often voiced criticism of the YTS is that there is nothing at the end.

The Government cannot guarantee a job and should not do so, but they can guarantee continued opportunties for self-development. There are already a wide range of voluntary schemes and MSC-funded schemes in our cities, but they lack co-ordination, use thinly scattered resources and are provided haphazardly. We should increase the facilities available and make greater use of existing resources. Why not open the universities and polytechnics during the evenings and weekends, when millions of pounds worth of equipment is left idle, training no one? Similarly, the capital provision exists for TVEI, the ITECs and training centres. That could be used for the benefit of the community. No allowances would be necessary; further training and qualifications for the unemployed would be the incentive.

We should always be looking to encourage self-employment as an option. A recent youth survey showed that 30 per cent. of young people wanted to be their own bosses. Indeed 25 per cent. of those who had taken up the enterprise allowance were under 25. Through the schools and the YTS, we must continue to advise young people on how they can become self-employed and run their own businesses.

I should like the enterprise allowance to be extended so that those who leave the YTS do not have to be unemployed for three months before taking advantage of the scheme. We should provide a scheme that pays young people from the moment they leave the YTS to help them to set up their own businesses. I believe that young people would respond to such a scheme which would remove the anomaly that they must be unemployed before they can go into business on their own.

At last we are getting it right and it is important that vocational education and youth training should be for all. It must be for the bright as well as for the not so bright. We need to encourage the more able young people to

consider new career paths and not only the safe options. One merely has to look at the quality of some British management to see how much training is needed.

By training the strong to achieve their full potential, we help the weak. The most significant achievement of our vocational education and youth training programme is that we are helping the weak to achieve aims that they would not have thought of achieving if Government help had not been available. They are finding new talents, perhaps through gaining employment as programmers or by setting up their own businesses.

Baseless criticism of the YTS is becoming progressively less sustainable. Unions that do not participate hamper industry and deny opportunities to young people. Companies that do not offer places are short-sighted and ignore the direct correlation between more training and better performances. Groups such as the Labour party and Youthaid, which purport to represent the interests of young people, actually destroy prospects every time they put someone off joining the YTS. Those groups have a strange idea of what is in the best interests of young people. It is like Greenpeace campaigning for lower taxes on harpoons.

As Youthaid reports, 10 out of 11 young people opt for the youth training scheme and 84 per cent. of those on the scheme are happy. That is a remarkable success story and one that any product manager would be delirious to achieve for the launch of a new product.

For too long this country has relied on the strong to help the weak. Effective vocational education and youth training allows the weak to help themselves to become strong.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may be helpful if I announce that I understand that the Front-Bench speakers would like to start at 6.45 pm. A number of hon. Members still wish to take part in the debate and I hope that they will bear that in mind.

6.26 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) on initiating the debate. It has been a fascinating discussion and there has not been too much dispute between Conservative Members and some Labour Members on a number of issues.

About 10 years ago an old and wise friend of mine said that we ought not to talk about "education" and "training", but that we should use the word "learning". From the day we are born till the day we die, we never stop learning. As babies and children, we learn from our parents and we progress through nursery school — if we are lucky enough to have such schools in our area—to primary school, secondary school, college, university or work experience and training. The last thing we learn is how to die—and we never repeat that experience.

The hon. Member for Saffron Walden made a significant point about linking education and training. There has been a division between the two for far too long. We need to change that. The suggestions of the hon. Member for Saffron Walden should be noted by the Government because they would provide a good base on which to work.

The hon. Member also mentioned the need for a department of education and training. I support that suggestion, though I should prefer the title of department of learning.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the relationship between local education authorities and the MSC. I have known occasions when the relationship was so bad that the two sides were virtually not talking to each other. That is a sad reflection of the way that training has developed and of the difference between the funding for the MSC to support training and the funding for local education authorities.

Two or three years ago the education authority in my county had discussions with the MSC and one of the principal reasons why a local technical college was able to stay open and provide the facilities that it was built for was that we got funding from the MSC and allowed young people to use part of the premises to occupy their time. It involved about £650,000—a form of blackmail from the MSC to the education department to provide space for its programme. That space was intended for the specific purpose of training young people in higher skills than those being offered by the MSC. I do not criticise its training of young people, but the facility was not being used for its intended purpose.

I went through the traditional training system—I was an engineering apprentice for five years. Apprenticeships lasted from the age of 16 to the age of 21 — so if someone was 16 years and 2 days, he could not obtain an apprenticeship. I was 15 years 11 months when I was offered my apprenticeship, so I was rather fortunate. It was very clear cut, and the formula was based on the old craft guilds. The apprentices, journeymen and craftsmen followed a set procedure that dated back to the middle ages.

The pattern has changed and we have moved from five-year apprenticeships to four-year or even three-year apprenticeships, depending on the skills required. However, we are not adjusting in industry to those changes. We still talk about apprenticeships, but we should put them in the right context. Both employers and trade unions must look again at craft training and apprenticeships. Indeed, it may prove necessary to dispense with that whole aspect and instead think of training and retraining, regardless of age.

We are in a vacuum because the old system is disappearing and there is no new system to take its place, and that is creating many problems. The education service is under pressure because of the reduction in Government spending. The Ashington technical college in my constituency is doing a magnificent job, but it has to cover a county of about 50 miles by 50 miles. It cannot adequately provide for those living in the more rural parts. The college has developed an annexe system which, although good, could be better with the right investment. I am very proud of that college; indeed, I am an ex-student of it. In the good days it had money to buy equipment and provide facilities. With the cuts in spending today, young people are not having the right opportunity to develop their skills.

Conservative Members have referred to the training of those aged 14 and over in local industry. I remember when the coal industry was predominant in my constituency. By the end of the second world war, young people were conditioned to entering the coal industry, although they might also have had to enter the Army for a short time.

[Mr. Jack Thompson]

There was no alternative for them. A 10-year-old was aware that he would be a miner. Times have changed, and so has industry.

I could not support a system where the emphasis in schools was placed on conditioning children of 14-plus to become virtual clones for local industry. Training in and understanding of industry is one matter, but the training of young people for only one industry is quite another matter, and I would not be happy to support that.

There has been some discussion about the industrial input in training colleges. I remember when mature students, sometimes with 10 or 15 years industrial background, undertook teacher-training. That was an excellent scheme. Today, we could not find anyone who would willingly leave industry to train as a teacher. That is the sad part of the current trend.

Industries in my constituency underuse their training facilities because they cannot afford apprentices. They would be happy to take on more young people if there was some Government support. I am fortunate to be involved in the Industry and Parliament Trust and I am also seconded to the North-West electricity board, which has an excellent training centre just outside Manchester. It would be happy to train young people at that centre, which is underused, but it does not have the necessary finances. There should be financial support for that sort of scheme.

I am glad that we have been given the opportunity today to discuss these issues. I hope that there will be a number of other occasions when we can discuss them again so that we can eventually obtain the system that the hon. Member for Saffron Walden genuinely supports, and which I support in principle.

6.36 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): The theme of the debate has been partnership, and the partners within the system are, first, the children and young people who want their curiosity satisfied. That means stretching them. I served on the Swann committee for five years. The message that came from every part of the country was that young people were dissatisfied with their education because they were not stretched, not because they were being taught too much. However, I think that there is too much teaching of the sort that Mr. Gradgrind indulged in —filling little pitchers with fact. Speaking as a former university teacher, I met far too many students who entered university far past their learning peak. They had achieved entry by being crammed for exams by skilful schools. They no longer had a great deal of intellectual curiosity, so their three years at university were often disappointing for them and for their teachers.

Secondly, the teachers are currently an issue in themselves. One of the great problems is that they are torn between the manifest demand outside teaching for specialists in robotics, maths, physics and other subjects and their ineradicable belief that no differentiation in salary should be made between one faculty and another. It is an important and difficult question to which too many teachers do not pay sufficient attention.

The third partner in the group is the board of governors of a school. My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) said that we should pay business men to take on the governorship of schools, but that is not the reason why they do not sit on those boards. It is because it is a non-job. It is an important, difficult and taxing task, but the amount of decision-making open to them is derisory. No one worth his salt would come out of business to do that job. We must devolve real authority to the governors.

Of course, we must consider the parents. It is sad that at a time when parents have so much leisure—more than they have ever had in our history—teachers are almost unanimous in saying that involving parents is virtually impossible. I do not blame the parents. During the 1960s and 1970s teachers spent a great deal of time saying, "Hands off—this is a specialist job. Anything you bring to the school will be old-fashioned, out of date and tiresome. Will you kindly leave us alone to get on with the job of teaching your child in a modern way?" Having sown that wind, they are now reaping the whirlwind and finding great difficulty in persuading parents to assist in schools—despite the fact that many of them would be glad to do so.

The Government must give serious attention to videos. More than half the households in Britain have a video. I am prepared to bet that entertainments represent 95 per cent. of the programmes on those videos. We have to develop a major programme of educational videos for pupils to take home with them and use on their home videos. Half of the pupils would lack the self-motivation to do that properly, and they could stay on at school to be taught in classes which themselves would be halved. The other pupils would spend their time at home learning from the masters of the trade and in a form to which they have grown accustomed. We need a modern day Carnegie. If we cannot find one, the Government will have to do it for themselves. The Government will have to set up a massive trust—videos, unlike books, are expensive to produce—to provide copyright-free videos so that people, without pirating them, can copy them for their children.

Mr. Sheerman: The Open University would do that tomorrow.

Mr. Rowe: The Open University may well do it tomorrow, but it takes up to six years to produce a video, and that would be too long.

The employers are the last link in the partnership, and it is true that they do not know what they want. The Government have been coherent and right in their approach to the qualifications net. We have to develop a method of choosing people by aptitude rather than by qualification.

We should allow teachers far more opportunity to train and retrain but it will be expensive to do that. We should seriously consider whether our school terms are not too long. We use our schools as a social control mechanism, and for that reason people keep their children at school for many months of the year. In practice, much of what goes on in schools could be condensed without loss. If one did that, there would be more time for teachers, as part of their contract, to be trained and retrained in ways that they would like. I believe that children could be found placements in industry and thus gain experience.

It is sound that the Manpower Services Commission should be the engine for so much of this change because the Government have some authority over the MSC, whereas they have no real authority over the national education system. However, I know from my own constituency that schools are finding it increasingly

difficult in Industry Year to find work placements for children because of the demands of the expanded youth training scheme. The Government must remember what their left hand and right hand are doing.

6.43 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I understand that I have only three minutes to speak. If I could spend the time agreeing with the motion, that would be enough, but there are harsh realities to be faced. I never cease to be amazed by the bland effrontery of the Tories when they put forward this type of motion:

"That this House calls for future policy towards 14 to 19 year olds to be based on a close integration of education, training and the Youth Service, taking full account of the aims and objectives of Industry Year."

We talk about Industry Year, but let us be clear: it should be called "Lack of Industry Year" or "Death of Industry Year" because of the Government's actions. That is the reality that young people face.

The Government have talked about close integration. We would love close integration, but there is disintegration of the entire education system in Britain because of the sheer brutality of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Prime Minister. The right hon. Lady has ordered the Minister virtually to destroy industry. British industry is in the greatest crisis that has ever been witnessed because of the Tories—and they talk with bland effrontery as if they really mean what is said in the motion.

I heard the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), wealthy and well-heeled, talk about unemployment dominating us until the end of this century. Left to the Conservative party and to him, of course it will. We have to face the fact that unemployment is not an act of God, although the Government talk as if it were. It is an act of this Government under the system in which they believe. The Government do not know how to handle the system in which they profoundly believe. Therefore, within the framework of that system they do not know how to handle the state system of education. The Government are pouring money into private education and taking it away from public education.

The Government have talked about education, training, youth service and leisure. They have given plenty of leisure to the youth of this country and they are now putting them on training schemes largely to keep them off the unemployment registers. If one added young people to the unemployment list, there would be 4 million unemployed. That is harsh reality, no matter what the Government say.

Within the three minutes I have had at my disposal I have not been able to do what I have done in every education debate and every education Question Time in the past 12 years—discuss how to advance the cause of education. The one thing that will advance the cause of education in Britain is to get rid of this Government. We must fund education properly and value our teachers and children properly. The Government will never do that until they are made to do so by the people of this country, represented by the Labour party.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): My reply to this debate gives me a golden opportunity not only to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) for initiating the debate with his excellent speech but for his distinguished career in youth and community service over many years. Many of us remember him, between 1966 and 1968, as a very distinguished chairman of the Young Conservatives. My hon. Friend had a special ability to organise conferences such as the one we have witnessed this weekend. He subsequently went on to be chairman of the Manchester youth and community service council.

My hon. Friend also played a significant part in the programme entitled "Youth Charter Towards 2000". He also has the dubious honour of being the Member who sponsored me for the Conservative parliamentary candidates list. This speech gives me the first opportunity to thank him publicly for that. Despite his latter digression, his judgment in these matters is normally sound and his concern for education and community development is certainly unquestioned.

My hon. Friend, in speaking to his motion, was skilful in cataloguing the various schemes which have been introduced in the past seven years. I welcome his praise of many of them. I also welcome his suggestion that there should be greater coherence if we are to achieve the various targets we have set ourselves. Not least of these is our attempt to increase awareness in the minds of the young of what programmes are available and to convince them and their parents that we have a common and integrated approach throughout Government.

All the speakers in the debate seem to have agreed on one thing—that young people represent the future. If we do not give them the chance to develop the skills they need and do not encourage the right outlook, prospects must suffer. The well-being of this country depends on our giving young people the knowledge and understanding to build the nation's ability to create wealth. For this reason, much depends on our approach to education and training of the young.

There are several key elements in that approach, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden. We must offer a wide range of choices and opportunities. We must give access to marketable skills and establish schemes and a system which are coherent in philosophy and practice. More than that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) said, we must bring young people into contact with the world at work and develop the enterprise culture early. We must change attitudes and make the development of enterprise and initiative a common feature of education and training for young people.

I noticed that the word enterprise was generally lacking in the speeches of Opposition Members. There were only one or two exceptions. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) left it until the last gasp of his speech, and then mentioned it only in passing when he said that the Labour party wants local authorities to encourage enterprise. We appreciate that local authorities play a part, but they should not take the lead. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler) said, we must stimulate and develop enterprise this year. Those whom we are trying to encourage—the Government and local government — represent the acceptable face of bureaucracy, and we ignore that at our peril.

My hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden mentioned the opportunity that this year offers. He wanted an improvement in the interface between industrialists and

[Mr. David Trippier]

educationists. The initiative of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce is to be welcomed and encouraged. It has the support of the Government, the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress, professional organisations, the churches, women's groups and many others who perhaps realise, as I do, that we should have done this 30 or 40 years ago, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Education and Science said.

It is widely accepted that, irrespective of whether we like it—we do not—there is in Britain today an anti-industry, anti-enterprise and anti-profit culture. Things have improved considerably while the Government have been in office—we can point to clear evidence of that. However, we do not pay sufficient regard to industries that provide the wealth that pays for the essential services that we have come to accept such as better schools, hospitals and roads. The strand that joined the speech of the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and Labour Members, when outlining the fantastic programmes that they say that they will get involved in—they say that they will throw the cheque book at every problem—is that they never spell out the detail of their programmes or say where the money will come from.

Industry Year is designed to start to change cultural attitudes so that, once again, the most talented people will choose to work in industry. It is important to stress that the definition of industry being used this year includes tradable goods and services that people need and want. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) rightly reminded us that we are not talking solely about manufacturing industry, but about the important service sector as well.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): You never do.

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Gentleman reads our White Paper on regional policy of nearly two years ago, he will see that we chose our words carefully. He will see that the grants that are made available, principally through the Department of Trade and Industry, have been confined to manufacturing industry—that we have discriminated in favour of the manufacturing sector. We signalled a change by saying in the White Paper that we would no longer discriminate against the service sector. We have wide support for that view, and so we should. We have looked across the Atlantic and seen where the new jobs have come from there. Growth, wealth creation, and employment creation have come principally from the service sector.

Mr. Holt: Did my hon. Friend see the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, speaking on television, when he said that his party is committed to introducing higher taxation for the very people who must be induced to go into industry to provide the entrepreneurial skill that we so desperately need?

Mr. Fisher: The top 5 per cent.

Mr. Trippier: I saw that programme. I was enthralled that the Leader of the Opposition referred to enterprise, which I welcomed. He said that there would have to be an increase in taxation——

Mr. Fisher: For the top 5 per cent.

Mr. Trippier: Quite frankly, the top 5 per cent. do not bring in the money necessary for the programmes that the Opposition are talking about. I cannot think of anything that would be more of a brake on enterprise or act more as a disincentive to those we are trying to encourage than the Government taking more of their earnings, with the result that the risks that they take are not adequately rewarded.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Minister agree that we have witnessed the destruction of enterprise in the past six years? As I said in my speech, if the Government do not do something to resuscitate industry, constituencies such as the Minister's and mine, in which 45 per cent. of youth training scheme leavers go on to the dole queue, will have no employment to offer because there will be no enterprise. What will the Government do about that?

Mr. Trippier: There is not much of a debate on this issue because the Labour party's record in government is appalling. Its policies for entrepreneurs and enterprise were non-existent. The hon. Gentleman is supposed to be my shadow opposite number, including my responsibility for small firms, and I find it extremely difficult to stomach the fact that the Labour party has not mentioned enterprise or small firms in either of its last two manifestos. It has no interest in encouraging such activity.

The Industry Year message must be put across strongly to the education sector. The generation in education now is that from which most of our future entrepreneurs will be attracted. However, the attitude of parents is important, and the Industry Year message is aimed at them, too. There is little point in persuading students to look to industry for careers if their parents still try to steer them towards the so-called softer options, which at the moment unfortunately assume higher status. Parents must be convinced of the importance of industry and enterprise. We hope that companies will hold open days for the local community so that everybody can understand and appreciate how much industry contributes to the local and national well-being.

It is essential that companies and schools form closer links, perhaps by companies adopting a local school. This is a two-way process. Students can learn about industry, and companies would be able to contribute and perhaps alter the learning process so that children develop the right skills. I should like all school leavers to be able to understand a simple business plan and a balance sheet. I wish that I had received such training at school.

I am not convinced about tax allowances for industrialists, but that is obviously a matter that I should have to refer to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in any event. I tend to agree with colleagues who answered that argument. It is far better to encourage people to come in from industry to speak in schools. That is improving all the time. The Department of Education and Science and the Department of Trade and Industry are involved in promoting knowledge of industry among schoolchildren through the industry education unit in the Department of Trade and Industry, which is running an interesting scheme called the mini-enterprise in schools project, in conjunction with the National Westminster bank. The target is to have at least one mini-enterprise in every secondary school by the end of Industry Year. That is quite a target—there are about 7,000 secondary schools—but at least 30 per cent. are already covered. The projects give

youngsters an opportunity to understand the pleasures and pitfalls of business life while at school. It will give them a good understanding of enterprise.

I warmly welcome what the hon. Member for Huddersfield said about the youth training scheme. This is the first time that I have heard it said publicly that the Labour party broadly — I am not taking the hon. Gentleman's words out of context—supports YTS. I do not want there to be a partisan attitude towards the scheme. The hon. Gentleman knows that members of the TUC are commissioners of the scheme. It is a first-class scheme and has helped many youngsters to find full-time employment. It is the best youth scheme that we have ever introduced.

Thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden, we have had an opportunity to discuss the issues early this year. I hope that the message of this important year will be understood, and that its relevance to young people will better equip them for the challenge and opportunity offered to the nation in future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls for future policy towards 14 to 19 year olds to be based on a close integration of education, training and the Youth Service, taking full account of the aims and objectives of Industry Year.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State for Transport, I should announce that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

As a long list of right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, I intend to give priority to those who were not called when we last debated this important matter on 9 December.

7 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move,

That this House approves the Government's White Paper on the Channel Fixed Link (Cmnd. 9735).

I am delighted, but surprised, that the Opposition want this debate on the Channel tunnel. I am delighted because many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have important points to raise, and surprised because I do not understand what the Opposition seek to gain. Perhaps they want to embarrass the Liberals, as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) is in favour of our decision, but the Liberal candidates in east Kent are all against it. That is strange. The Liberal manifesto for the 1984 Euro-elections advocated

"Community Investment in major transport links, including a Channel Tunnel".

I wonder whether the Kent Liberal candidates dissociated themselves from the manifesto at the time of the campaign.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I continue to support our manifesto, and the Secretary of State congratulated me on that recently during Question Time. I suspect that some Conservative Back-Bench Members are not keen on the scheme.

Mr. Ridley: I am not criticising the hon. Gentleman. I was merely wondering whether he could have a word with some of his candidates.

The Labour party also has its problems. Some Labour Members are in favour of our decision, and some are against it. So why choose to debate it? It puts the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) in a terribly embarrassing position. He must steer between the Scylla of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) who represents the National Union of Railwaymen, and the Charybdis of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who represents the National Union of Seamen. It is beastly of the Labour party to make him run the gauntlet again between those two political rocks. Surely he found it unpleasant enough the first time.

But the Labour party has a worse failure to answer for. Labour Members keep demanding more infrastructure spending. They have debate after debate about the need for spending, and more jobs. Indeed, there is another one this week. Yet here is a massive infrastructure project, which will create a great number of jobs—we estimate about 40,000 man-years of employment. The jobs will by no means all be in the south-east. There could be orders of £700 million to £800 million for railway equipment alone which can be fulfilled only by midlands and northern firms. There are also great opportunities for more employment on railway operations. The tunnel will bring benefits to all regions of the kingdom by providing quicker, cheaper, more reliable means of transport to the Continent, thus helping employment. But what does the

[Mr. Ridley]

Labour party do? It voted against the tunnel before Christmas, and it has a three-line whip to vote for its amendment tonight. Does it want jobs, and infrastructure, and investment, or not?

When I announced the invitation to promoters last year the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who was then Labour's transport spokesman, said:

"We welcome any suggestion of considerable investment in the infrastructure. Indeed, we have been asking the Government for many years for precisely this sort of infrastructure development, with its impact on jobs and industry."—[*Official Report*, 2 April 1985; Vol. 76 c. 1078-79.].

How can the Opposition say that with one transport spokesman, and with another ask the House to vote against the project that they welcomed? The Labour party's inconsistency is extraordinary, although some individual hon. Members hold different views.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The main point is that the infrastructure development will assist the south-east. Many of us are worried that the White Paper pays no regard to transport links with the north. The bottlenecks around London will become more constricted, not less, as a result of the link. Expenditure is needed on the road network to the north, but that will be even harder as a result of the Channel link. The right hon. Gentleman should be providing better links to the north, not to London.

Mr. Ridley: I know that the right hon. Gentleman is in favour of the link and sees the importance of connecting it to all areas, and I entirely agree. For that reason we are building the M40 as a relief to the M1. It is as quick to go from London to Birmingham up the M6 via Oxford as it is via the M1. There is massive infrastructure development taking traffic from the south-east to all quarters. There is a huge road programme to the south-west. Wherever we can, we are investing in roads to improve the position. Moreover, there are great opportunities for the railways to run through services from the north to the Continent. The right hon. Gentleman must welcome our decision and encourage all concerned to grasp the opportunities.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): What evidence prompted my right hon. Friend to make the statement that the Channel tunnel could offer a "cheaper" means of transport across the Channel? Does he accept that the more British people hear about the tunnel, the less they like it? That is clear from a recent opinion poll which shows that more than half the population do not want the tunnel, and that only one third are in favour of it.

Mr. Ridley: First, the magic has worked even quicker than I believed because the ferries are now saying that they will cut the cost of the journey by 30 per cent. That is even before the tunnel is built. Therefore, my hon. Friend must concede that the tunnel route is cheaper. That shows what a little competition can do. Secondly, if my hon. Friend intends to steer a course according to every favourable opinion poll, I do not know what he will do when they are unfavourable. That is not a sound basis for forming opinions.

There is another dilemma. The Labour party complains that all the benefits of the tunnel will go to east Kent, and not to the north of England. But my right hon. and hon. Friends from Kent have expressed the opposite concern, that the tunnel will have unfortunate employment effects on the county. Let me tell the House my view of the truth, which is also contained in the White Paper.

For the next eight years, during the construction period, there will be growing employment in Kent, both because of the increasing ferry business, and the construction work on the tunnel, roads, railways and so on. There could even be a shortage of labour during that period. In the long term, after the tunnel is open, a great deal depends upon the extent to which it attracts traffic which would otherwise be carried by the ferries, and also upon the extent to which local authorities in Kent can use, imaginatively, the opportunities created by the link to generate new employment in the county. When the link opens, employment on the ferries will certainly fall. On the basis of the promoters' estimates of traffic, the Government judge that the total direct employment on cross-Channel transport operations will be some 1,500 less than it is now. But thereafter, employment will rise again, both on the link and the ferries. Moreover, there will be jobs from associated developments, so I suggest that the truth is that the long-term employment effects are fairly neutral.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is anxiety in the Medway towns that the very considerable infrastructure improvements to cope with the direct effects of the fixed link may militate against the essential project which the Medway towns are proposing to improve what is almost the blackest unemployment spot in Kent. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the Medway towns that he will look with considerable sympathy upon their proposals for a third Medway crossing?

Mr. Ridley: The M20 is the main road to the Channel ports and will be the main road to the Channel tunnel. That road will be developed to three lane motorway standard irrespective of whether there is a Channel link. Traffic going to the Channel ports will be so great that it will demand that upgrading in any case. Building the link does not add to the road programme in respect of that road as that road is already allowed for in the programme. In no sense is money being taken from other parts of the road programme because of the decision on the fixed link.

I have already said that we shall look extremely sympathetically at any other roads needs which arise in Kent because of the link, and the discussions are already planned to start such an investigation.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the employment consequences which he said would amount to a loss of only 1,500 jobs at the ferry ports, I draw his attention to the fact that that figure is based on what, by the White Paper's own admission, is a most misleading basis. The White Paper bases that calculation on two ferry ports only, Dover and Folkestone. My right hon. Friend must know that there are well founded fears in at least 15 ports up and down the country, including the second largest Channel port, Ramsgate, which is not mentioned in the White Paper. One would not base a calculation on test cricket on the basis of what happened at Lords or the Oval and make no mention of Old Trafford, Headingley, Trent Bridge, and so on.

Mr. Ridley: I was a little confused about the last part of my hon. Friend's intervention and I confess I do not see the relevance of that, but the figure I gave was based on the estimates of tunnel traffic made by the Channel Tunnel Group. That includes the whole of the ferry industry, not just the two ports that my hon. Friend mentioned. We believe that some ferry ports will increase employment as the link opens rather than reduce their employment. I cannot give my hon. Friend detailed figures for every port. I would have to have the wisdom of Solomon to say what will happen, but my hon. Friend knows my views about the future of Ramsgate.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I recently wrote to the right hon. Gentleman to ask if his Department had estimated the effect which the Channel tunnel would have on the container ports. He replied that that information was confidential. How is it possible for container ports to plan for the future if they do not know what the tunnel's effect will be on their trade?

Mr. Ridley: That is true of all industrial enterprises at all times. When the west coast ports lost business to the east coast, nobody was able to warn them or provide any precise estimates. That is normal business risk. It is quite impossible to make a detailed forecast of the effect on every port.

The White Paper sets out the reasons for our choice of the Channel Tunnel Group's scheme. This was the joint choice of the British and French Governments. Both Governments would have liked to see a drive-through scheme, but the uncertainties and risks of all three drive-through alternatives led us to believe that there was a risk that they might prove too expensive to finance. I repeat that no Government funds or guarantees will be available. The CTG scheme appeared to the Governments to offer the best prospect of proceeding to completion. It has other advantages as well and these are set out in detail in annexe B of the White Paper.

The main purpose of the White Paper is to look forward. It is not the job of the Government to set out the virtues of the CTG scheme and its potential attractiveness to customers and therefore to investors. That is for the promoters to do over the next few months as they set about raising the capital. We believe the Channel tunnel will greatly enhance the choice for travellers between Britain and France by adding to the existing air and ferry options a shuttle service for road vehicles and an efficient city-centre to city-centre rail link. For road travellers, the shuttle link will reduce the crossing time, with all stops included, by well over half compared with the ferries.

The rail link from London to Paris and Brussels will be very competitive with air transport. These are great benefits. Already, there is talk of reducing fares in order to compete. That, too, is excellent news. The Government's task is solely to consider the impacts of the scheme upon the transport network, and the environment.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Surely the Government's task is to consider the impact on employment. Paragraph 39 of the White Paper states:

"Firms in the East and West Midlands will be well placed to compete for contracts to build the shuttle trains, and there are firms in Scotland and the North-East able to supply construction materials."

As the Minister knows full well, I believe that the Channel tunnel will have a negative effect on jobs in the north-east. We shall lose jobs as a consequence. It might help the situation if the Minister can give me a guarantee that the construction materials that firms in the north-east are able to supply will be the ones which the tunnel builders will order or will the Minister say that it is a free for all where the construction firms can shop around the Continent and the world and get their goods at the cheapest price?

Mr. Ridley: I have already dealt with the employment aspects. If the hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said, he can read it in *Hansard*. I made it clear what the employment consequences are likely to be. I said that in my opinion the jobs which will go to the midlands, the north and Scotland were considerable as there were £700 million to £800 million worth of railway orders alone to go, as well as the building material orders to which the hon. Gentleman referred. He knows full well that I cannot promise that those orders would go to any particular firm. His constituents have the opportunity to gain employment if they can win these contracts. I am certain that they have a very good chance of doing so.

I was about to describe the effects on the transport network. British Rail is to invest between £290 million and £390 million in rolling stock, the Waterloo terminal and certain other limited improvements between Folkestone and London. The impact upon the roads programme in the foreseeable future is not large. The Government's proposals for the M20 from London to Folkestone are already in the programme and would be necessary whether a fixed link were built or not. We shall also press ahead as fast as possible with the replacement of the A20 between Folkestone and Dover. We shall also consider with Kent county council what improvements to local roads may be necessary.

The environmental impacts of the Channel Tunnel Group's scheme are set out in some detail in the appraisal by Land Use Consultants and their associates of the promoters' environmental impact assessments. That is a valuable independent report. It does not necessarily represent the Government's views on all points, but it forms the basis of the Government's assessment of the environmental aspects of the further work that needs to be done. It quite deliberately looks far into the future.

It is not surprising that if one looks 30, 40 or 50 years ahead, the M20 may need to be widened to four lanes in each direction. It will not, by any means, be the only motorway requiring such treatment by then. It would be for our successors to deal with these problems. In the short term, however, our concern is to make the scheme environmentally as acceptable as possible, in matters such as the arrangements for the disposal of spoil, the workings at the foot of the Shakespeare cliff, the landscaping of the Cheriton site, and the arrangements for the construction of the tunnels under Holywell Coombe.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that one of the important impacts could be the attraction of freight away from the roads and back to rail when the Continental freight network is linked with the British network and substantial savings are achieved? Has he received any more recent estimates of the impact of that change, and does he recall that an earlier estimate was that only about 250,000 tonnes of road freight would go to rail? Will he comment on whether that is rather an underestimate? Does he agree that it might be considerably

[Mr. David Howell]

more than that, with great benefit for the environment generally and a reduction in the number of heavy lorries rolling through villages?

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. I speak without having a figure before me, but I think that the latest estimate is that there may be a fivefold increase in the amount of freight that the railways carry across the Channel as a result of the project. If I have misremembered the figure, I shall correct myself in writing to my right hon. Friend. There will be a considerable increase.

We have retained the right to require the promoters to investigate and then implement the most acceptable arrangements, and the promoters accept this. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I intend to work closely together on this and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport will be consulting locally in Kent about it. If he is fortunate enough to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will describe the plans for consultation.

With the tunnel becoming nearer to a reality, the natural conservatism of the British people is coming to the fore. Will rabies come? Will the Russians invade along the tunnel? Should Britain not remain an island? I sympathise with these emotional arguments, but I do not believe that they are rational. I shall conclude by answering the most frequently asked question, which is "Do we really need a tunnel?" Those who do not want to use it need not do so. Nor will they be asked to pay for it. But if millions want to use it and pay for using it, whether they be tourists, businessmen, importers or exporters, what right have we to stop them? It is for the Channel Tunnel Group to persuade the investors that we need a tunnel. If it considers that it should be built and is ready to pay for it, I do not think that the House would want to stop it.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill) *rose——*

Mr. Ridley: I shall not give way. I must bring my remarks to an end.

It is remarkable that the two Governments were in the invidious position of having to choose between four schemes. All were well prepared and those behind them were prepared to raise the money and to take the risks. What a transformation this is from the drab, centrally planned, Socialist concept of soak the taxpayers and ram it down their throats because the gentleman in Whitehall knows best. It is a sign of the virility of our entrepreneurs, our economy and our engineers that we can give the Channel tunnel the green light.

7.24 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'whilst accepting that the Channel Tunnel Group-France Manche scheme may have the potential to encourage the development of modern British Rail network and bring benefit to some parts of the country, declines to approve the White Paper "The Channel Fixed Link", Cmnd. 9735, without full knowledge of the terms of the Treaty and its Protocols, without any Government commitment to necessary financial assistance to British Rail, without any Government plans to maximise the opportunities for industry and communities away from the immediate location of the Fixed Link, and without the Government accepting responsibility for and safeguarding against the damaging employment implications of the scheme, or providing adequately for the rights of those affected by the decision to have their views taken into account; and recognises that the proposals present a threat to consumer choice in crossing the Channel with the creation of a private monopoly with its implications for prices and charges, without the guaranteed continuation of port and ferry facilities.'.

Three hours to debate what has been described as a historic decision is far too short a time. I apologise to the House in advance if I do not give way to interventions as frequently as I might have done. There are a lot of issues to be covered, many of which were not covered by the Secretary of State.

In the speeches and statements and in the White Paper, the Secretary of State repeats that the Channel tunnel is an imaginative and exciting project. He has waxed eloquent about the job creation factors of the scheme and the benefits that he hopes will accrue. When he has been asked pertinent and penetrating questions, he has replied, "All will be revealed in the White Paper." We have the White Paper now and there is little in it, if anything, which could not have been put before us a fortnight ago. There is nothing in it which could have delayed its publication for a few days, as the right hon. Gentleman said, but which became a fortnight.

We accept that the CTG-FM scheme is the best of the schemes that the Government examined. In our view, it suits our transport needs and provides opportunities for British Rail. We believe that it could allow the benefits for some parts of the country to be distributed more evenly. If we were starting afresh to consider job creation schemes, we might well not start from where we are now. However, we are starting with the Government's decision, and we have a responsibility to ensure that the best outcome is achieved. We have tabled a positive amendment, and we are not defensive about it.

The problem is that the Secretary of State, having made a decision—or having had it made for him—wishes to cut and run. He wishes to avoid responsibility for developments that are damaging to the economies of various parts of the country and for the necessary planning to maximise potential benefits. He has prepared his alibi well in advance. In page 2 of the White Paper there is an all-embracing disclaimer which appears as a footnote:

> * *The Government expressly asserts that it makes no representation, either express or implied, as to the viability of the project with any intention or desire that such representation be relied upon by any investor*. It should be noted that, in this White Paper, estimates of CTG-FM's financing needs are their own, and the impacts of the CTG-FM scheme — on employment, the environment, the merchant fleet etc.—are all based upon the *promoters'* estimates of traffic.

I cannot recall seeing such a massive cop-out in any other White Paper. We shall press the Secretary of State to accept the figures and to take the action appropriate to them.

The treaty is due to be signed on Wednesday. It is unfortunate that the White Paper gives us only the broadest outline of what the treaty contains. We are merely told in paragraph 50 that the treaty

> "will also enshrine the private sector nature of the link and the concessionaire's right to compensation in the event of political interference or cancellation by either Government."

Can we not be told, less than two days before the treaty is signed, what the financial penalties are that the Government have negotiated? Why are we being asked, in effect, to buy a pig in a poke? Surely the Prime Minister will not sign a blank piece of paper in Canterbury in less than 48 hours from now?

Paragraphs 53 to 60 tell us that negotiations will continue on the concession agreement and that the final package will contain the freedom to set tariffs, subject only to the European Community's and the Government's rules on competition. These and many other issues need to be clarified.

I was disappointed when the Secretary of State told us that he would leave the consultation arrangements to be dealt with by his hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport when he replies to the debate. The White Paper suggests what will happen. The Secretary of State from the beginning ruled out a formal public inquiry. In earlier debates he has asserted that the hybrid Bill procedure gave better opportunities for those affected to canvas their concerns, and it is clear in the White Paper that he has conceded his failure to convince a wide section of opinion in the House. Equally, he has failed to satisfy the doubts of many interests in Kent, for example. In paragraphs 46 to 48 he attempts to present a more convincing case and to answer the many representations that have been made on consultation.

I shall deal with paragraph 48 in some detail. It seems that an extra statutory authority of planning machinery is to be established between the Government, the Kent county council and the other local authorities concerned. We understand that the committee will be chaired by the Minister of State and that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), will be involved in discussions. I note that the hon. Lady is in her place.

We are told in paragraph 48 that there will be widespread consultations. It adds:

"Among the subjects to be considered by the committee will be the adequacy of the road system in Kent to cope with the traffic flows expected to follow the building of the link, and specific local economic and environmental problems that may be caused by the development of the link. As one of its first tasks the committee is expected to commission a more detailed study of the potential impact on Kent of the CTG-FM scheme both during and after construction. This is to be carried out with the widest possible consultation of relevant interest groups in the county."

So far so good, but what will be the result of the consultation? Everyone knows that there will be economic dislocation of the local economy. That appears not to be in doubt.

Paragraph 41 makes it clear that 7,000 jobs will go in the ports and ferries if the promoters' forecasts are accurate. Several questions follow from paragraph 48. To whom will the consultative committee report? When will it report? Who will carry out the detailed study of the potential impact on Kent? A responsible Government would have carried out those studies before, not after, taking a decision in principle.

Further questions will have to be posed. Will the consultation group make recommendations? There would seem to be no point in having such a formal machinery, nor in commissioning these studies, unless the schemes are drawn up and acted upon. Will the findings of the consultative group be finalised and incorporated into the drafting of the hybrid Bill? What will be the effect of the consultations on those who may wish to petition the Select Committees which are due to be set up under the hybrid Bill procedure? If any of those affected by the scheme take part in the consultations, will they be prevented from gaining access to the Select Committees?

Paragraph 62 of the White Paper sets out the hybrid Bill procedure and attempts to define the term locus standi. In paragraph 62, the Minister, trying to assuage the feelings of his Back Benchers, says:

"However, the Government, as sponsor of the Bill, will not seek to oppose the right of anyone to appear before the Committees on a petition to secure protection, either for their personal interests, or for the proper interests of any organisation or group which they may have been appointed to represent."

The use of the word "proper" seems to be a heavy qualification on who will go before the Select Committees. Will the Secretary of State give a categorical guarantee that appearance before the consultation group or submission of objections to it will neither prejudice the right of petitioners to appear before the Select Committees nor extinguish those rights? Unless these questions are answered fully, the consultative machinery will be seen as nothing more than a gigantic public relations exercise and a hoax on the public.

At the heart of our concern is what will happen not just to the south-east, but to the rest of the country. If the economic benefit is to be distributed about the country, British Rail must be given the opportunity to develop its services and to have its infrastructure, its motive power and rolling stock ready for the opening of the tunnel. Therefore, I welcome the British Rail press statement, issued on 4 February, in which it explains how it intends to run through-trains from different parts of the country and hopes that there will be discussions with immigration and customs officials to have these facilities carried out on the train, although there seems to be some doubt as to whether those bodies will co-operate.

British Rail, in its press statement, appears to be thinking ahead, even if the Secretary of State is not. If the required investment is made available, it will give a boost to British Rail's estimates of both freight and passenger services; and if the money is spent in the United Kingdom, jobs will be created. However, I dispute the Secretary of State's assessment of when the investment needs to be made available and whether his policy towards British Rail is adequate to match its requirements.

At Question Time on Monday 3 February, in column 6, I asked the Minister to give an assurance that British Rail's external financing limit would be expanded to accommodate Channel tunnel-related expenditure and that other BR expenditure would not suffer. It astonished me when I was given such an unequivocal "Yes" to that question. However, in a subsequent answer in the same column, he back-pedalled very fast and said that BR's EFL would be smaller during the period 1990-93 in any event. If that means that the investment and infrastructure will be in place before that time, we might accept it. However, I suspect that the opposite is the case. I believe that investment in BR must be expanded, even if the Channel tunnel is not to go ahead. If passengers and freight traffic are to be encouraged back to the railways, then BR's customer image needs to be enhanced throughout the entire network, and not just that part that is related to the Channel tunnel service.

The Government must put money into BR. The White Paper concedes that there will be public spending associated with the tunnel. That much is evident from paragraphs 29, 30 and 31. There is a little hedging in paragraph 31, which says:

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

"The Government will give sympathetic consideration to supporting with Transport Supplementary Grant proposals from the County Council arising directly as a result of the fixed link project."

We know with certainty that public money will be going into roads development. Why, then, will the Government not do the same for British Rail? Paragraph 27 makes it clear beyond any doubt:

"It will be for BR to raise the money for this"—

that is all the investment about which we have spoken—

"as for all its investment programmes, out of its own resources or borrowing, and not by way of Government grant."

Nothing can be more clear that the Government will not put any money in.

In paragraph 66, the Minister expresses his hopes in this way:

"The Government has high hopes of seeing the link built and of it becoming a valuable national asset serving the interests of the nation for many years to come."

I should like to see those high hopes come to fruition, but they will remain just pious hopes unless there is positive Government intervention.

I commend to the House the latest issue of *Town and Country Planning*. In an article called "Where have all the planners gone?", Andrew Thorburn says:

"So far, no one has sketched out the consequences for Britain of the funnelling of traffic through this small corner, and the extra traffic likely to be stimulated . . . Never has the need for proper regional planning been more apparent.

Some have felt that we can get by without this in times of recession when little is changing, but the construction of the largest infrastructure provision in Britain's history will require the rethinking of many development and investment policies, and rural conserveration policies, as well as a review of the transportation services throughout the south east. Where is our machinery for this?"

I concede that that was written about the south-east of England, but it is of equal relevance to the country as a whole. The Secretary of State will have nothing to do with this. His view is that if everything goes well, the scheme will be a success; and, if it does not, he is simply abrogating his responsibility in advance. He is like an old lag in a Scottish court pleading the special defence of "incrimination" or "impeachment". He is saying, "It wasn't me who did it; it was someone else. It was market forces that did it."

Without proper planning, investment and regional development, the nation will come to regret the decision and wonder what went wrong. The Opposition have a duty and a responsibility to the nation to seek to remedy the failings of the Minister and of the Government. We shall press the Government for as long as we are in opposition, and we shall discharge our responsibilities and duties to the nation when we become the Government. I commend our amendment to the House and invite right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House to join us in the Lobby tonight.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I point out the obvious—that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members want to take part in the debate. The shorter the speeches, the fewer will be disappointed.

7.38 pm

Mr. Peter Rees (Dover): I shall endeavour to obey your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) will forgive me if I do not follow all the interesting points that he made. I admire the delicacy with which he has tried to reconcile the interests of various regions of the kingdom and, in particular, the interests of the National Union of Railwaymen and the National Union of Seamen. My hon. Friends may wish to explore that further.

I was interested to notice that the hon. Gentleman said that, of the four schemes, this is the one that he would prefer. I am ready to admit to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that of all the four schemes, this is likely to do the least damage to the economy and environment of east Kent. I was reassured that the environmental point had been made by the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council. However, I must emphasise to my right hon. Friend the deep and continuing concern of Dover and east Kent about the project, even though matters have moved on since 9 December.

I appreciate and am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his sensitive response to the points made by me and by some of my hon. Friends who represent Kentish constituencies relating to consultation. I appreciate the setting up of a consultative committee which is to be chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I note that it will be sited at Maidstone. That is appropriate in the first instance, because Maidstone is the seat of the county council. However, I hope that this will not rule out meetings at Dover and Folkestone, which I am sure would be welcomed by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) who, ever assiduous in his championship of his constituents' interests, is sitting in his seat tonight. We are sorry that the conventions of Government deprive him of the opportunity to make a direct contribution to the debate. I hope also that the consultative committee will not rule out direct, bilateral contact between the Dover and Shepway district councils and the Department of Transport upon matters that are of prime concern to them.

The point is well made in paragraph 64 of the White Paper that this is the largest civil engineering contract for many years. This may be a matter of congratulation to some, but naturally it is a matter of concern to those who will be most directly and immediately affected by the project. It is important that complaints by local people should be quickly and impartially assessed and remedied. I warmly associate myself with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe, who feels that these complaints should be assessed by an independent person, possibly from the Department of Transport—a local ombudsman, if you will, who would be on the spot for the purpose. When my hon. Friend the Minister of State winds up the debate, I hope that he will say that he is giving careful thought to this possibility.

The main environmental impact will be felt at Cheriton, in my hon. and learned Friend's constituency. I have no doubt that he has been and that he will continue to be assiduous in taking up the points that concern those who live in the area. However, there is a little friendly rivalry between my hon. and learned Friend and me. There will be a considerable impact on Dover. I refer in particular to the working platform that is to be set up beneath the Shakespeare cliff and to the disposal of soil there and at other places. I am glad, therefore, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has referred back to the consortium the problem of soil disposal. I hope that this

important and sensitive matter will be discussed either by the consultative committee or bilaterally with the Dover and Shepway councils.

I do not wish to carp, but competition is dealt with all too briefly in paragraphs 2 and 4 of the White Paper. It merely states that there will be fair competition and that the matter will be governed by English and European Community law. I seek, therefore, three assurances from my hon. Friend the Minister of State, although I appreciate that some of them do not lie exclusively within his responsibility. First, I seek an assurance that predatory pricing under these legal systems will be ruled out. Secondly, I seek an assurance that he is satisfied that the United Kingdom Government and the European Commission would be able to move quickly enough if unfair competition were to develop in the Channel. Thirdly, I seek an assurance that he feels that there will be a continuing place for ferries operating in the Channel from Dover and Folkestone. I believe that there is both a national and a Kentish interest in the continuance of their operations.

The economic and employment impacts upon east Kent were touched upon, perhaps too lightly, by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North. This is where there is the greatest uncertainty for the people of east Kent, and it is the largest gap in the White Paper. Paragraph 41 admits frankly that there will be fewer direct jobs in east Kent with the link than without it, but there is no consideration of alternative sources of employment, except rather briefly in paragraph 41, which refers to

"new jobs in ancillary industries."

This may be a matter primarily for other Departments, but it is important that there should be evidence of deep thinking taking place on this subject now. It cannot be left for six, seven or eight years. Evidence is needed that thought has been given to the possibility of setting up enterprise zones, to the granting of assisted area status, and to the provision of a free port, or free ports, in east Kent. I should like thought to be given to the future of the port of Dover as a container terminal so that it can be built up to compete with Rotterdam. It tells heavily against previous Governments that Rotterdam has managed to catch, in fair competition, so much of the business that should have come to United Kingdom ports.

According to all accounts, the French are pouring money, as they are quite entitled to do, into the Pas de Calais and the surrounding département. I am the first to recognise the constraints upon public expenditure, but I should like to know what positive steps the Government are considering to assist east Kent to maintain its position against the competing attractions of north-west France.

I am sure that the House will not feel that I have dealt in too summary a fashion with this important issue. I hope that my constituents will not feel that I have done so. However, they will recognise that many other right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I have tonight voiced, I hope articulately, the legitimate concerns of my constituents.

I must also point out to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North that the Opposition's amendment is rather bogus. It attempts to reconcile too many disparate interests. I recognise the difficulty of the hon. Gentleman's position, but I am sure that he will not expect me to support the Opposition amendment in the Lobby. It does very little, either explicitly or by implication, for my constituents or for the neighbouring constituencies in east Kent.

As for the motion in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, unless and until the concerns that I have voiced are properly met I am bound to maintain the reservations that I expressed about the project in our debate on 9 December. My position in the Division Lobby tonight must reflect those reservations.

7.46 pm

Mr. John Silkin (Lewisham, Deptford): When the Secretary of State rejected instituting an inquiry, he owed a moral duty both to this House and to the country to provide us with a White Paper that fully set out the Government's point of view. In fact, the White Paper is a very slim volume which skims over the important points. The most important question was put by the Select Committee on Transport in paragraph 128 of its first report. It said:

"The one question which has persistently hung over the committee's inquiry is 'Is there a need for a fixed link?' The committee has not received any very satisfactory answers to this question."

If it is trying to find the answer in the White Paper, the Select Committee can whistle for it. The nearest to an answer is to be found in paragraph 2, which says:

"The Government's policy for international transport is to increase consumer choice and promote efficiency by encouraging competition and innovation."

That is a splendid collection of words, but they mean exactly nothing. They do not explain why a fixed link does all these things or what the benefits will be. The White Paper, therefore, does not answer the question.

Then we thought to ourselves that if the White Paper does not contain the answer, perhaps the Secretary of State for Transport knows the answer. What did he say? I took down his words as he spoke them. He said that he was often asked whether we needed a tunnel, but he did not answer that question. He merely said, "If we do not like it, we need not use it." That is perfectly true. It is like a justification for murder. If we do not like it, we need not use it. That justifies it. That was the right hon. Gentleman's only contribution to the alleged need for a fixed link between Britain and France.

The Secretary of State dealt superficially, as does the White Paper, with the major points that are still at issue. First, there is the environment. During the debate on 9 December I deplored the fact that there had been no input from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I have to say that I was wrong. There slipped through the House of Commons, without anybody knowing it or being deeply aware of it, a rather important order. That order came into effect on 1 January 1986. It was a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food order which reflected the licensing provisions under the Dumping at Sea Act 1974.

Heretofore under that Act if one was going to bore a tunnel a licence had to be applied for which might or might not be granted by the Ministry. The order in question says that no licence is required to bore a tunnel under the sea-bed. When I looked at the Channel Tunnel Group's prospectus, it did not seem that it would be economically possible to do the job that it was talking about on the figure quoted if they were going to dump the spoil—which, you will remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, comes to 1 million cubic metres—onshore. But if that is to be dumped at sea, a different situation arises. That is the cheapest and easiest way of doing it, and that, incidentally, kills all the spawning herring, sole and plaice in the English Channel.

[Mr. John Silkin]

We heard—I do not want to go too far into it at the moment—the employment difficulties for Kent which the right hon. and learned Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) reiterated a moment ago. He is tolerant in thinking that he will get an answer. I doubt that he will. However, those of my hon. Friends who come from the north-east, Wales or Scotland who are worried about the effect of a fixed link across the Channel believe that Kent and the rest of the south-east will benefit at the expense of their parts of the country. I do not believe that any of them will benefit.

The truth is that, as the White Paper hints, there will be a permanent drop in employment in Kent and there will probably be a drop in employment in the rest of the country. The White Paper says that there may be some increased employment in ancillary industries. But, like the right hon. and learned Member for Dover, I too wait for an answer on that. Where are those ancillary industries? What will they produce? What employment will they have? I do not believe it.

There are many points that I could make, but other hon. Members want to speak and there will no doubt be plenty of time on other occasions to do so. However, I want to finish with one small but important aspect—security. In paragraph 2 the White Paper says:

"Historically, Britain's island status has often been an advantage. Today it is a practical and economic hindrance to closer links with Europe."

Some of us would dispute that concept anyway, but

"Historically, Britain's island status has often been an advantage"

is rather an understatement. The plain fact is that that island status has protected this island over the past 1,000 years. It is worth at least a thought or two.

We have seen the Government virtually destroy our fishing industry and cut down on our merchant shipping and they are now talking about a sufficient number of ferries for our defence requirements. No doubt they have a 1914 concept of taking soldiers across the English Channel to some vast trench system in France. By destroying the number of ferries that operate, they are doing the same as destroying our merchant shipping and fishing fleets—they are destroying Britain's capability to produce, as we have over the centuries, the finest sailors in the world. I hope that, if that were all that there were against the provision of a fixed link, it would be sufficient for the House to think again.

7.54 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): On 9 December the House took a decision in favour of a fixed link. Those of us who represent north-east Kent did not endorse that decision, but I have no wish to go over that again. It is left to us, representing our constituents, to make the best of what I have described as the least worse solution. In that context——

Mr. Robert Hughes: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the House did not take a decision in principle the last time we debated this subject. We divided on a motion for the Adjournment of the House, nothing more. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to do what he wants tonight.

Mr. Gale: If I may say so, the House might regard that as a bogus point. The matter under discussion and the vote were plain and properly interpreted.

In the context of the decision that has been announced, I am pleased that, of the four that were on offer, the Channel Tunnel Group has obtained the contract because, in its make-up that company represents some of the finest engineering skills in the world. I hope and believe that that company will pay considerable attention to the environmental effect that any construction will have on the beautiful countryside of Kent.

I have one small voice to raise from the heart of Kent, and I hope that it will not be a voice crying in the wilderness. On Wednesday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to visit Canterbury. Were she to go a few miles further down the appalling Thanet Way, she would arrive in the Thanet towns, where we endure 27 per cent. male unemployment. That may be an inconvenient fact for my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench to acknowledge and it may be an inconvenient fact for the Government to acknowledge. It makes the political map look untidy. There should not be such unemployment in the prosperous south-east, but the fact is that there is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and I have been working hard for a considerable time to try to turn that situation round. We are faced with a declining agriculture industry, which was labour-intensive and is becoming less so, and, with a decline in the bucket and spade holiday, we need to provide facilities that the modern tourist requires so that we can regenerate our tourist industry. That is in hand.

The greatest asset that the Isle of Thanet has is the development of the port of Ramsgate which, in the past few years, as a result of vigorous marketing and tremendous courage on the part of the developer and the district council, has been attracting large numbers of tourists to the region. The demise of that port, not mentioned anywhere in the White Paper by name or in any other form, would be not only damaging but devastating to north-east Kent.

Thanet has created an enterprise agency and built up the East Kent Development Association, but we look to the Kent county council and the Government to provide us with the thing which we cannot provide in any way, shape or form—the infrastructure that we need if the port of Ramsgate is to develop.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was good enough to visit Thanet early in December and, having experienced just a little of what we had to tell him, said that he would be willing to take the key road in the area—the Thanet Way—and trunk it. He told us, and has reaffirmed, that his Department would be willing to do that fairly swiftly. I understand that that decision is dependent upon Kent county council.

However, I am a little worried because there is no mention whatever of north-east Kent in the White Paper. Paragraph 31, headed "The UK Road Network", says:

"Kent County Council are studying improvements which may be needed to some County roads in the area as a result of the building of the fixed link; and they will be dealing with them under their normal procedures. The Government will give sympathetic consideration to supporting with Transport Supplementary Grant proposals from the County Council arising directly as a result of the fixed link project."

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will state firmly to Kent county council his belief that the Department should make that road a trunk route.

Kent county council should recognise the needs. In "Channel Fixed Link: Issues for Discussion by Kent

County Council", which was published in November 1985, Mr. W. H. Deakin, the county planning officer, wrote:

"The County Council's role is to identify the consequences of proposals for Kent, and to maximise the balance of advantage to the County."

He said that the council's objective should be

"to give East Kent the best chance of compensating economic activity and employment, by way of securing Government commitment to development incentives; this is especially important, considering the economic advantages possessed by the Region Nord-Pas de Calais in northern France, an area which already enjoys substantial national and European assistance, and which is planning to capitalise to the full on any economic potential of a Fixed Link, and against which Kent would be competing on very unequal terms."

Two weeks ago, I paid a visit to Nord-Pas de Calais when I had the opportunity to discuss the effects of the link with M. Dupilet, the Member of Parliament for Boulogne. He kindly gave me a document which, roughly translated, is entitled "Channel Fixed Link." That document was available to all those who attended a ceremony held in France on 20 January. It sets out, chapter and verse, exactly what the French Government are doing in Nord-Pas de Calais, how much they are spending and on what they are spending it in terms of ports with the development of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne, in terms of roads with the Boulogne-Dunkirk coast road and many others, and in terms of rail links from existing ports, not some new Chunnel terminal. We have no equal document available to us, because this point has not been considered.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State a few questions. I do not believe in pork barrel politics, but the Government cannot have it both ways. Either we create jobs or we are in the business of destruction. With respect, I do not think that my hon. Friend can ask turkeys to vote for Christmas. Does my hon. Friend recognise the need of north-east Kent, especially the Thanet towns? Does he acknowledge that the Chunnel will have a profound effect on those towns? Does he recognise the need for improved infrastructure, especially of the Thanet Way, the Thanet-Dover coast road and the Thanet-Ashford link? Does he have plans for the establishment of a regional council at ministerial, or at least Civil Service, level to ensure the development of the Thanet, Canterbury, Dover, Ashford and Swale districts, which together make up a region roughly the size of Nord-Pas de Calais? Unless the answer to all those questions is yes, I have a feeling that the fine words which no doubt will be uttered in Canterbury on Wednesday will have a ring as hollow as the Trojan horse.

8.2 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) has done well to remind us that all is not gold in the south-east. His figure of 27 per cent. male unemployment is on a par with the figure in my constituency in the Isle of Wight.

I welcomed the Government's decision when the Secretary of State made his announcement on 20 January. I said then, and I endorse now, that, after various rumours and leaks to the contrary—when we thought we might get a road tunnel—the French and British Governments have chosen the scheme that has the best chance of succeeding. Certainly, if either of the two bridge projects had been favoured there would have been an even greater outcry from Kent citizens than at present, and it would have been fully justified.

I welcome what definitely appears to be an easing of the purse strings for British Rail. That comment appears in the White Paper, covering the years 1990-93, when it is accepted that British Rail's EFL will be exceeded——

Mr. Robert Hughes: No.

Mr. Ross: It is in there. That was also acknowledged last Monday by the Secretary of State when the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) asked him a direct question which I followed up. I hope that some common sense prevails. I hope that the Minister of State, who, I am glad, is keeping his portfolio to look after BR, will continue to press BR's claims for extra capital to carry out the programmes that are desperately needed. There is now a great opportunity for the Channel tunnel link to improve our railways.

Some people have queried with me BR's ability to run through freight services to the continent from various parts of the United Kingdom because of the differences in the loading gauge. The Sunday newspapers wrote a lot about this, including about the argument the other way around —that is, from France to Britain. British Rail's press release of 4 February is clear on this point. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North quoted from it, but I shall quote from the last page, which states:

"Freight customers in the North, Midlands, Wales and Scotland stand to gain particularly from the link. Freight will be cleared at inland customs depots round the country. Fast and frequent services through the link will cut transit times significantly and rail's natural economic advantage with long haul traffic will help exporters to be competitive in reaching the markets in Europe."

It states:

"Twenty trains a day of containers and freight wagons in each direction will help to keep heavy vehicles off the crowded roads of the South East."

I assume that there are not insurmountable difficulties in dealing with the Berne gauge. That is the assurance. I suspect that there must be considerably more capital investment if we are to take full advantage of the opportunities to provide through freight services for Scotland, the north and the west of England.

I give notice that the alliance will consistently press that point. I hope that the Minister of State will ensure that more financial incentives for private rail sidings throughout Britain will be forthcoming. That would be a great help.

This is a marvellous opportunity to get substantial quantities of freight back on to rail and off our already overcrowded roads. We must take full advantage of it. What is more, construction of the link provides substantial job opportunities at British Rail Engineering Ltd., Metro Cammell and GEC, especially at the BREL factories at Derby, York and Crewe. Swindon will not get in on the act. I bitterly regret that as a long-time supporter of the old Great Western Railway.

Like many hon. Members, I have been lobbied consistently on the question of a public inquiry. In our earlier debate, I put forward a proposal, which was made to the Select Committee on Transport, for a strictly limited 20-day hearing on the vital issues as they affected Kent. I do not intend to press that again because I accept that it has deficiencies. On the whole, I think that the White Paper gives substantial reassurances.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is dropping that proposal. The right hon.

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) issued a press statement the day the decision was announced saying he would push that proposition forcefully. What has changed?

Mr. Ross: I have argued the point with the leader of my party. I was sure that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North would pick that up. I told my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) exactly what I thought. One cannot conduct just a 20-day hearing because every party, including Friends of the Earth and other environmentalists, will want to get in on it. I do not think that the hearing can be cut short. I believe that a 20-day hearing will leave everyone dissatisfied. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North is correct—there is an internal argument on this proposal.

On the whole, I think that the White Paper gives substantial reassurances on the issue of consultation and the right to petition. Paragraphs 48 and 62 are especially significant. I am grateful to my colleagues on the Select Committee on Transport, especially the Chairman, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Bagier), for supporting my suggestion to the Committee some weeks ago that we should offer to take evidence in Kent. Last Wednesday, we went to Maidstone to take evidence from Kent county council. All three main political parties were represented and had their chance to make their point. Regrettably, that is not the case—I think that I take the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North with me on this—with the consultative committee which the Minister of State is to chair. The consultative committee is to comprise the seven districts and the county council, all of which are Tory controlled. That is a mistake which should be rectified. Surely the other party leaders on the county council and on Dover and Shepway councils—I am sure that we should say the lot—could be included without making the committee top heavy.

I personally accept the arguments against a full-scale public inquiry, but the hybrid Bill Committees must also be prepared to travel to take evidence in Kent. I remind the Labour party that, in 1974, the late Anthony Crosland reintroduced the Channel Tunnel Bill in its original form so that the petitioners would avoid abortive costs. Moreover, he made it clear that he did not think that a rail-only link without the shuttle was economically feasible. That was said in an answer to me on 3 April 1974.

As we have heard, Kent Members have been making clear the need for substantial expenditure on road infrastructure. An undertaking has already been given about the Maidstone bypass becoming a three-lane road, but Kent county council wants to see four lanes. The third Dartford tunnel will have to be constructed. The M25-M26 junction at Chevening needs attention. They are rightly anxious about the substantial loading facilities at Cheriton and the access thereto. The environmental problems have already been mentioned. There is a need to make much greater use of industrial land at Ashford. There is the problem of subsoil disposal. I understand that the material is no use for road construction.

I wish to make a brief constituency point. One of my constituents, Brigadier Hopthrow—he knows what he is talking about because he has been involved in water matters and gravel extraction for many years—has said that there is a rumour that the gravel required for the Channel tunnel is likely to be dredged from the Channel east of the Nab tower. That would have a substantial effect on littoral drift and erosion on the Isle of Wight. We suspect that we have suffered a great deal from gravel extraction along the south coast and in the Solent. I make the plea that gravel should not be taken from my part of the world to construct the Channel tunnel.

A park-and-ride facility at a suitable spot on the M25 has much to commend it. Commuters from the Ashford area will need reassurance about their future services into London. I shall quote from the second leader in the *Daily Telegraph* last week. It is not a paper that I normally read, but I found this comment and I fully support it:

"If the Channel Tunnel Group, to whom time means money, want to get moving and keep moving, they would be well advised to set aside a substantial sum for damage limitation. If the county's defenders think that the money offered is not enough, it is up to them to demand more. If they want more landscaping, it is for them to demand it. The Government may be able to stay aloof from the finances of the Chunnel; they cannot dissociate themselves from the mess it makes. Usually it is the fate of those seeking to defend their patch to find themselves up against hard-faced bureaucrats in Government employ. In this instance, the bureaucrats are more likely to be on their side against the entrepreneurs. It is not a gift-horse to look in the mouth. Preservationist in East Kent should cheer up, limber up and prepare to make tough terms."

I could not put it better myself. We shall be supporting the Government tonight.

8.11 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) is a fellow member of the Select Committee. I am pleased that he mentioned the M25 because one of the results of the White Paper on the Channel link will be tremendous pressure upon the roads around London. The M25 is overloaded before it has been completed. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister realises that considerably more improvements will be needed in future for the many motorists who will be attracted to driving through the Channel link.

The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin) gave a somewhat selective quotation from the Select Committee's reports. He also made great play of the fact that a case for the Channel tunnel did not appear to be made out. At great length, the Opposition have tried to make it clear that they are not against the Channel link. They want to give the impression that they are vaguely against it so that all those who are opposed to any kind of link with the continent will think that they are doing a good job. In their long amendment, they have been exceedingly careful not to say that they are against the link. There is a degree of ambivalence in the Labour party's attitude.

Mr. Silkin: Perhaps I may reassure the hon. Gentleman that I am completely against the link.

Mr. Fry: I accept that.

I shall refer to the Select Committee's reports. Of the present Committee membership, only three were members of the Committee when we first embarked upon our lengthy inquiry in 1981. Despite the right hon. Gentleman's quotation, it is interesting to note that the reports in 1981 and just before Christmas came to the same conclusion. Even more surprisingly, the Committee came to the conclusion contained in the White Paper. The Select Committee agreed to the idea of a Channel link. It disagreed with the idea of a public inquiry and it recommended the scheme that the Secretary of State and

the Government have chosen. It must be unique at the moment for a Select Committee to chime in so thoroughly with Government policy.

Our fourth recommendation was that there should be a definitive vote of the House before the scheme proceeded. I should like to thank my right hon. and hon. Friends for giving the House that opportunity this evening.

It is interesting to know that it emerged from the Select Committee's investigations that those who are opposed to the Government's proposal can be divided into roughly three groups: first, those who are against any link; secondly, those who do not like the timing or the Government's method of approach; and, thirdly, those who do not like the scheme that has been put forward.

On the first point, it is ironic that some of the people who are against the Channel link are those who write to me saying how they object to so much of our freight being carried on the roads and not on British Rail. The Channel link has always been seen by British Rail as a major opportunity for it to take advantage of the length of carriage which this country lacks. That has always put British Rail at a disadvantage compared with many of its continental cousins.

The link will mean that for the first time British Rail can compete equally. It should have the opportunity to take many of the tonnes of freight that many of our constituents complain about because it obstructs our roads. British Rail has always been firmly in favour of the Channel link. For that reason alone, the link should be considered sympathetically.

There will be some people—I suspect they include one or two of my hon. Friends—who feel that we should not be linked to the continent in any circumstances. We all have constituents who have made that point. It is clear that the least disadvantageous of all the proposals is the one that has been put forward by the Government. The train tunnel can provide a link with the continent, but, what is more important, it will not destroy the ferry services. Not much has been said about that in the debate.

If any of the other schemes had been adopted, there would soon have been no ferry services between this country and the continent. That would have been against our national interest. It is all very well for the ferry companies now to say that they could be even more efficient and could cut fares in real terms by up to 30 per cent. but it has taken the threat of competition to bring them to that point.

The link will provide competition. There will be a choice. One can fly from Heathrow or Gatwick. The STOL port in London's docklands will soon be open and will provide another means of travel to the continent. Some ferries will undoubtedly still operate and we shall have trains going through the Channel link. The Government are providing a genuine choice for the travelling public.

The second group of people who object to the link is comprised of those who feel that there should be a public inquiry. A referendum has even been suggested. When I answered a radio phone-in programme the other day, I discovered that many of the people who object and want a referendum were under the impression that they had the choice of the money being spent on hospitals, schools or new roads. They were completely unaware of the fact that the capital for the scheme is to come from the private market. If we are to have a referendum on the subject, the public should be aware of the argument and know the facts which, at the moment, I am afraid they do not.

People object because they feel that the public inquiry system is the only way in which to deal with the many concerns and reservations which have been expressed. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had the courage not to have a public inquiry. I have for many years said that it takes an interminable time to take major decisions. For example, the A1-M1 link has rolled on for 12 years, and we are still awaiting the inspector's report. I believe that major projects should be settled by decisions of the House, questions of side roads and perhaps compulsory purchase being left to public inquiry. I believe that in that respect the Government are absolutely right.

The third group consists of those who object to the scheme put forward. When the Select Committee examined the four proposals, to my mind there was really only one solution. If one accepted that the decision had to be taken in January 1986, all the other proposals had serious defects: environmental and technical in the case of Eurobridge and Euro Route and many questions about the viability of the Channel expressway.

In the case of the two bridges, the enormous cost was not the least of the problems. In Committee I asked Sir Nigel Broackes whether he agreed that the English Channel was one of the most expensive pieces of water to cross. He agreed. I asked him if he agreed that if EuroRoute were built, it would remain one of the most expensive pieces of water to cross. He said that he thought so. Therefore, I believe that if the Government or the House had put forward a scheme which would be so expensive that no consideration was given to the travelling public, it would have been a major mistake.

In relation to the Channel expressway, I give full marks to the public relations campaign behind that proposal because it became a serious runner. However, when one investigated it, one came across many serious questions which had not been answered. For example, there is nowhere in the world where anybody has driven for 32 miles in a tunnel. The question of cost was vital. As the White Paper points out, two tunnels of over 11 metres were to be bored which would somehow be cheaper to bore than the 7 metre tunnels of the Channel Tunnel Group. There are too many unanswered questions on the Channel expressway.

The Government have come to the right and wise decision. Therefore, they deserve support in the Lobby tonight.

8.22 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): In recognition of the many others with strong claims to speak in the debate, from both sides of the House, my intervention will be studiedly brief. As a Member of Parliament for the north-west of England, I want to underline the importance of that part of the amendment which refers to the serious employment implications of the Government's proposals for communities outside the south-east. The word "damaging" is well chosen.

The Government's keenness to forge a fixed link with France contrasts sharply with their seeming unconcern about the deep and dangerous divide which now separates

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

the north from the south in this country. In linking Britain to another country, they appear content to countenance even graver divisions in Britain itself.

In the debate about Stansted I put it to the House that Manchester international airport — together with other airports outside the south-east of England—had a much stronger claim than Stansted to the huge investment which the Government were contemplating there. The same argument applies in this debate. To commit billions of pounds to the south-east, already the wealthiest region, at a time when other regions are starved of investment and devasted by unemployment will deepen and still further embitter the divide between north and south. In trying to link Britain to France, the Government risk tearing north and south in this country even more grievously apart.

It will be argued that many new jobs will be created by the channel fixed link; but they will not be jobs for the north, where any increase will be small and short term. Most of the new jobs will go to the south-east, and northern France will unquestionably do much better out of the deal than northern Britain. There will be substantial new investment to improve still further the infrastructure of the south-east. It will be investment from British taxpayers as a whole, from the north-west as well as the south-east, and that excites not just disquiet but downright anger in the region I represent.

The same money cannot be spent twice and, if it is spent in the south-east, it will not be available to reduce unemployment and the deprivation it causes in the north. That is the essence of our case against these proposals. When the Minister replies, is he prepared to concede that the White Paper must, at the very least, lead to an urgent revision of the Government's regional policy to take account of the implications of its proposals on the regions outside the south-east?

In many parts of Manchester today unemployment is three times higher than the national average. We heard earlier in the debate about unemployment in Kent. In Manchester we now have localities, in what used to be the heart of industrial England, where male unemployment is over 60 per cent., and others, including parts of my constituency, where more than two thirds of the under-25s are out of work. Is it not there and elsewhere in the north that new investment should now most urgently be concentrated?

It is much to their honour that 30 Conservative Members from the south-east have said publicly that new investment should now be directed outside their region. Ministers were also told by many of their party's leading young activists, in their conference at Blackpool yesterday, that the Government's critics on the north-south divide are not confined to the Labour party.

Opposition to the White Paper is utterly all-party in the north of England. There is strong insistence that the north's claims to more investment must now be the priority of priorities and, as the Minister must know, all comparative statistics justify that insistence.

There has been totally inadequate consultation about these proposals. Even the North of England Regional Consortium of local authorities has yet to meet a Minister to discuss its views. Many other important interests have been brushed aside in the Government's haste to do the wrong thing.

I reject the White Paper and hope to be joined in the Lobby by right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House in opposing its proposals. It would be the merest hypocrisy to go on complaining about the north-south divide tomorrow if we approve these proposals tonight. Action to repair and renew the links between north and south in this country must surely be a much more urgent priority than linking south-east England to northern France.

8.28 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I welcome the White Paper because I believe that the proposals outlined and the particular choice made by the Government for the fixed link are practical, technically sound and financially viable. The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin) suggested that the first sentence of paragraph 2 where the Government set out their policy

"to increase consumer choice and promote efficiency"

meant absolutely nothing. He will not be surprised to hear that I cannot agree with him on that. However, on another matter, I was pleased to hear him—he was wearing his naval reserve tie, the ensign that I am always pleased to see—air his concern about the problems and the future of Britain's merchant fleet. On that issue, I join him.

I believe that the scheme gives the best chance for the ferries to survive, while, at the same time, it introduces the powerful stimulus of competition into what has, until now, been one of the most expensive sea crossings in the world. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) has said that more detail is needed on how that competition will be maintained in future, but tonight the Secretary of State spelt out the fact that already we have seen a drop in ferry tariffs as a result of the decision to build a fixed link. The speed of decision was welcome. It is noticeable that that rapid programme was also acceptable to the French. I do not believe that Britain can, year after year, and decade after decade, take the length of time that we have to decide major projects through the system of public inquiry. That puts us way behind the rest of Europe on this issue.

The project is historic. It is obviously vast and also exciting. It is one for which the Government should take credit and in which this country, ultimately, will be able to take pride. It is also a measure of increased confidence in Britain and in what Britain can achieve that four competing schemes were researched, put together as a package, and submitted.

I should like to deal with three aspects arising from the fixed link decision—the development of the railway, the development of the road network, and the effects on the environment. Many hon. Members have already spoken about the railway. I agree that not for 100 years has such an opportunity for the development of freight and passenger services been opened up to our rail system. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the support that his negotiations with the French have already given British Rail, the most important being an equal partnership for the development of the through trains from London to Paris and from London to Brussels, and for the building of the locomotives and rolling stock. It is crucial to obtain the best opportunities for British industry, particularly in the midlands and the north, which many hon. Members have mentioned, particularly Opposition Members.

I also welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to an extension of British Rail's external financing limit to take full account of the opportunity that the Channel fixed link offers British Rail and the demand that it puts upon it. I can assure my right hon. Friend that I, for one, will be coming back on that issue in future because the fact is that, for many years, the French have given a higher priority to public investment in the railways that we have in Britain. In this new situation, we must rethink that issue.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend agree, coming from a not dissimilar constituency, that one would have greater confidence in British Rail's capacity to take advantage of this undoubted good opportunity if it had shown itself to be more capable of cutting fares to compete with other forms of transport?

Mr. Wolfson: I accept my hon. Friend's point, that British Rail will have to ensure that its fares are competitive so that it can continue to compete. However, I shall not be diverted from my point, which is this. Down the years, the French Government have been readier to subsidise their rail network in terms of capital investment in it and running costs than we have been in this country. It is important, in achieving a balance between sensible support for British Rail and unnecessary pump priming, that British Rail is not limited in the opportunity that it is given to build a competitive system with the French railways in the wake of the Channel fixed link. Let me give two examples—the success of the grande vitesse trains in France and the new improved commuter routes round Paris, which put British Rail to shame, particularly the commuter routes.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the investment being made in the SNCF in Paris puts successive British Governments, particularly this one, to shame anyway?

Mr. Wolfson: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. I am merely making the point that, in the new situation, British Rail's external financing limit needs to be extended, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says he will do.

It is essential that customs and immigration procedures are done on train if the new through trains are to operate effectively, particularly from Scotland and the north of England. I appreciate that that will require a fundamental change in outlook from our officials in both those services, but I argue that that is exactly what the Channel fixed link is all about—just such a change in outlook by the nation as a whole. Of course, safeguards against smuggling, disease and illegal immigration must be built into altered systems, but it is simply not on to make no fundamental change to our control system in the face of the dramatic change in travel convenience that through rail offers. Today, many hon. Members have spoken out about the advantages that the fixed link offers, with the growth of rail traffic, to passengers and freight. Decanting passengers for a customs check on long-distance trains through Britain will be a major disincentive to train travel and will have to be changed.

Before leaving the subject of the railways, I should like to comment on the effect that the fixed link through trains might have on existing commuter services, particularly through my constituency of Sevenoaks. I welcome an assurance that I have already had from British Rail, that it is well aware of the importance of maintaining a proper balance between maximising the opportunity for international business and achieving a proper service for captive commuters, for which, as it is well aware, it receives a subsidy from the taxpayer. I welcome its commitment to consultation with local people as the situation develops.

I should like to make particular reference to the M25 and the Dartford tunnel. It is essential that the third bore of the Dartford tunnel is built as rapidly as possible. We have a private enterprise solution to that. It is essential to move with great rapidity to get that work done. The traffic forecasts by the Department of Transport have consistently been grossly underestimated. I heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State struggling manfully the other day on the radio when dealing with the problems that already exist in the south-west section of the M25. He made the point, reasonably and honestly enough, that decisions on the size of that motorway were made 12 or 15 years ago. Now that he is in the decision-making seat, will he ensure that he gets it right on the Dartford tunnel, and does so quickly?

I shall confine my remarks on the environment to the concerns of my constituents. Other hon. Members will speak and have spoken powerfully for theirs. The consultative process in Kent must be genuine. I welcome the commitments given on that matter and we shall hold my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench to them. My first concern is the danger of urban sprawl eating into the green belt, especially in terms of warehousing development. The second is the increased pressure for major housing developments in west Kent and elsewhere. The third is the insidious squeeze to enlarge towns and villages on an ad hoc basis.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister believes that that development can be left to local authorities at district and county level: if they want development, they can allow it, but if they do not, they should not allow it. However, it is not good enough to leave it there, because the appeal procedure, the position taken by inspectors on those appeals in their advice to the Secretary of State and his decision bring us up against central Government policy.

I believe that an overall strategy is essential. Parts of the Opposition amendment on that issue have considerable relevance and that is something to which we should pay attention.

8.40 pm

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): I spoke during the debate on 9 December and I do not intend to repeat the points that I made then. However, I made it clear that I was completely opposed to a Channel fixed link for reasons very much on the lines explained by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris).

Since our earlier debate, the choice has been made. For those of us who opposed the Channel fixed link the Government's choice is the least damaging from almost every point of view, including the regional view. Obviously, regional considerations are what I have in mind.

One must acknowledge that the scheme presents British Rail with some opportunities, but there is precious little sign of spreading those opportunities over the whole of the United Kingdom or that the Government will make the

[Mr. Bruce Millan]

necessary finance available, if the White Paper is any guide. In several respects, I consider the opportunities to be marginal for the railways.

It is the least damaging choice from the regional point of view, but it is the least popular among those in favour of the fixed link who have been considering a drive-through facility. That has not been chosen, and any prospect of it has been put into the dim and distant future.

In terms of pricing, everyone has said that it is important, for several reasons, including consumer choice and defence and strategic reasons, that the ferries should not be completely destroyed when the Channel tunnel goes ahead. Obviously, it is impossible to guarantee that position unless a view is taken on pricing. Paragraph 4 of the White Paper states:

"the promoter would enjoy full commercial freedom to determine his commercial policy including the setting of tariffs for users of the link"—

that sounds absolute, but it is qualified,

"subject to domestic and Community competition law, which contain essential safeguards against anti-competitive behaviour including abuse of a dominant market position."

What does that mean? We have had no explanation from the Minister. It is gobbledegook. I defy anyone to explain rationally or sensibly what it means. There has been much talk of predatory pricing, but who are the predators and who are the prey? No one has explained that to us. According to paragraph 21 CTG-FM

"envisage that their tariffs will be around 10 per cent. less, in real terms, than today's level of ferry fares."

That is the basis on which it is going ahead, yet the Minister told us this evening that the existing ferry operators are already proposing to reduce fares by 30 per cent. in real terms. Who are the predators? From where does the anti-competitive behaviour that is mentioned in paragraph 4 come? What is the dominant market position? Will it belong to the ferry operators or to the tunnel operator?

It is nonsense to believe that it will be possible, except in the most fortuitious circumstances, to allow ordinary competitive forces to operate pricing across the Channel. If the Government are serious about maintaining ferry services, there must be price regulation in some form.

We have not heard from the Minister any sensible explanation of the White Paper, which in other respects is a completely inadequate document.

We have heard the argument about jobs during the construction of the tunnel. With unemployment in Britain at the present time, no one should disparage additional employment in any part of the country. However, the claims made were entirely exaggerated. The original summary of the project put forward by the CTG stated that

"Total employment created during construction will exceed 40,000 in the two countries."

That suggests that 40,000 people from the two countries would be employed on the tunnel, but from the White Paper we get a different interpretation of what 40,000 means. It turns out to be 40,000 man years spread over six years in the United Kingdom. That is an entirely different proposition from 40,000 people being employed. The distribution of the jobs involved realises our worst fears, especially in Scotland and the North.

We are told that almost half the United Kingdom jobs will be in Kent, which is not one of the most underdeveloped areas in the country. There will be good opportunities in the east and west Midlands. We are lamely told at the end of paragraph 39 that

"there are firms in Scotland and the North-East able to supply construction materials."

All sorts of extravagant claims were made in the early stages that the jobs would go to the north of England and to Scotland. That is absurd and many of us made that point in the debate on 9 December. The Government's White Paper has confirmed it.

It has been said that work will go to British Rail workshops. Some of us are seeing the Minister of State, Department of Transport tomorrow about the obliteration of the British Rail workshop at Springburn. There are no opportunities for additional work there. If the Minister tells us tomorrow that, in view of the White Paper, Springburn will be kept going at a sensible level, I shall be delighted, but I do not believe that we will receive that answer.

The short-term aspect of jobs during the construction period is important, but the longer-term aspect worries the regions. The long-term advantage will go to the south-east of England. Paragraph 41 explains the difficulties about the reduction in employment on the ferry services on the assumption that the ferry services survive, but we are not allowed to know the basis of that assumption. The Government say that they will not publish their economic assessment, but on the basis of the Government's assumptions there will be a loss of employment on the ferry services but they hope that that will be made up as the years go by. They also mention generating new jobs in ancillary industry, again in the south-east.

The regional considerations are not dealt with, despite the fact that they were a major element in the debate on 9 December. The Government have no regional policy and there is no indication in the White Paper of what effect the fixed link will have on the regions of the United Kingdom.

In the long term, the economic development, the jobs and so on will come to the south-east. It would be impossible to prevent that from happening, even if we had a Government who were determined to try. It is futile to argue that jobs will be evenly spread throughout the United Kingdom.

Even if we were providing additional road and rail links — and the White Paper sets out only developments connected directly with the south-east — the main advantage would still come to the south-east. The argument that the advantages will be spread throughout the United Kingdom recalls the view of those who said that, if there were good links between Aberdeen and the rest of the United Kingdom, North sea oil jobs would be spread throughout the country. Of course, it did not happen like that. I am glad that, for good geographical and physical reasons, the Aberdeen area had the main benefit from North sea oil development. No Government could have prevented that from happening, even if they had wished to do so.

The argument that if a proper road network were developed between Aberdeen and Devon and Cornwall there would be as many jobs going to the west country as there would be in Aberdeen was a manifest absurdity, as is the claim that the Channel tunnel development will result in job opportunities being spread throughout the United Kingdom. Those opportunities will arise in the most overcrowded area——

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Millan: I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind if I do not give way; I promised to speak briefly.

The economic advantages of the project will come overwhelmingly to the south-east of England, which is precisely the part of the country where we should not be spending money to provide such opportunities when there is devastating unemployment in Scotland. [HON. MEMBERS: "What money?"] Any sort of money, whether private or public.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Is my right hon. Friend aware that British Rail is to build or make extensions to six platforms at Waterloo station and to viaducts and other systems? That is happening at just one station. Will not that be paid for with public money?

Mr. Millan: Of course it will be public money. I dealt in my speech on 9 December with the whole question of public and private money and I have no intention of going over that argument.

The concentration of expenditure, whether of public or private money, and the ultimate concentration of activity will be in the south-east of England. That is incontrovertible and it will be against the interests of the rest of the United Kingdom. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe said, that will emphasise the north-south divide.

Stories have appeared in the Scottish newspapers over the past few days—I presume that they are valid—that the Secretary of State for Scotland is engaged in a tremendous battle to prevent the Treasury from clawing back £6 million from the Scottish Development Agency. A great political battle is going on within the Government about a comparative trivial sum for development in Scotland, yet we are being asked to approve a White Paper which sets out the expenditure of billions of pounds of public and private money for the benefit of one of the richest areas in the United Kingdom. Those of us who represent Scotland are absolutely against the project, and we shall carry our opposition to the limit.

8.54 pm

Mr. David Couch (Canterbury): As befits a former Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) made a Scottish speech and argued strongly, as he is entitled to do, for more industry and activity in Scotland.

I do not blame the right hon. Gentleman for adopting that approach. He said the same things on 9 December, and I followed him on that occasion, too. I was somewhat parochial then, and I shall be somewhat parochial today, because I wish to speak about the problems of what the right hon. Gentleman called the rich area of the south-east of England.

We in Kent are relatively rich and we have a lower rate of unemployment than the national average, but I remind the House that we are debating a White Paper which is in two parts. We are asked to approve the Government's choice from the four options, and we have to consider the consequences of approving a fixed link. The consequences that worry me most are the environmental consequences in Kent.

Paragraph 28 of annex B to the White Paper says:

"Local opinion in Kent generally has been against a link."

I would describe opinion in east Kent in rather stronger terms. I believe in the link and have said so in the House and on many occasions over many years. I am not popular in my constituency for having taken the national view.

Many of my constituents believe that I have let them down by taking a national, not a parochial, view. Those of us who support the link may be wrong, but I believe that we are right. However, I wish to outline the view of local people who will be directly affected by this major engineering event.

I have received many letters against the project and quite a few in favour of it. A distinguished engineer, who is a member of the Royal Society and was a promoter of the Channel bridge, suggested that the best solution for me would have been a bridge across the Channel and a tunnel under Kent. Perhaps that would have made life easier for me, but it is too late to ask for that now.

On Wednesday I shall be welcoming the Prime Minister and the President of France when they come to my constituency to sign the treaty. Every Prime Minister whom I have served under has been to my constituency —and even the Pope has been there. I think that it is appropriate that the treaty should be signed in a part of the county where there is grave anxiety about the project and dissension about whether the link should be provided. The Prime Minister was brave to choose to sign the treaty in the county where there are many critics.

Many people are against the link, for many reasons. The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Mr. Silkin) said that many people are against the link for its own sake: we should have no link with the continent; let us keep Britain an island with a 22-mile moat between us and our enemies. That is what our people have been taught in school for the past 200 to 300 years—and in three wars during the past 200 years, they have been proved right.

I have tried to tell people that today the nations of Europe are not our enemies, but our allies and partners. Perhaps those thoughts of Russians with snow on their boots—memories of the first world war—are still in people's minds. I simply remind them that military historians often say that we must not try to fight the next war on the lessons of the past, but rather to think ahead.

Tonight I wish to speak only about the environmental consequences for Kent. The tunnel will be a magnet for traffic, and many people say that Kent already has too much traffic. The price that Kent will pay will be very high. I agree with those who fear the effect on the environment. There is a real danger that damage will be done to a beautiful part of England. Indeed, the White Paper states that many times, as does the environmental appraisal by the land use consultants.

The challenge to the Government and the Channel Tunnel Group is that they must limit damage to the environment. I remind the Government that we are debating not only the choice of link, but their response to the challenge to safeguard the environment in Kent. Paragraph 15 of the White Paper refers to the choice that

"has an environmental impact that can be contained and limited."

In paragraph 32, it states that

"the environmental damage will be kept to a minimum."

Therefore, the White Paper acknowledges in those and many other paragraphs that there will be environmental damage.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the Government recognised that there would be problems in

[Mr. David Couch]

Kent, and that they were concerned about that. Paragraph 45 of the White Paper states that the Government would now be

"concentrating upon making the chosen scheme as acceptable as possible."

From now on, there must be good public relations where there has been none before. Indeed, there must be much more than good public relations—there must be consultation. I am glad that we have been promised a consultation committee.

The project will need explanation because there has been little to date. It will also need participation. The Government should not be afraid of that. Let them not only listen to the people of Kent, but invite them to have a say in the final decisions about the environment. The Government must clearly explain the meaning of a hybrid Bill and how it works. Such a Bill must be sold to the public.

There is an understandable clamour for a public inquiry. Without one, people will want to know the meaning of the hybrid Bill. It may be that they will have a better hearing with a hybrid Bill. The Government must explain what such a Bill does and how it works.

The Government must take positive steps to safeguard the environment. I do not simply mean engineering, building, road works and rail investment. Let us hear about limiting the intrusion of those developments into the environment. Let us hear about landscaping—artificial hills that can screen unsightly engineering and industrial developments. That has already happened in other parts of the country. For example, at Torness in Scotland an artificial hill now screens a nuclear power station. The sight of a nuclear power station on the way to Edinburgh is hardly attractive. The Government should tell the public how they intend to reduce the adverse effects of this great tunnel development.

I counsel not only the Government, but the Channel Tunnel Group, because in this private sector activity that group has a great responsibility to show that it is concerned about protecting the environment. It should strive for a new image—not only as an engineering company, but, in this modern age, as a company concerned about the public and about the impact on the environment.

I reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) said about roads. The M20 is to be a three-lane dual carriage motorway connecting with the M25. We daily read about the crowded three lanes of the M25. Would it not be better to build the route to Europe as a four-lane motorway so that we will not have to install the fourth lane in 10 years?

As mentioned in the environmental appraisal, there has to be traffic direction. It will be better to funnel the traffic to the Channel tunnel on the M20, when it is properly built, than for people to seek the best way they can to avoid the crowded M20, as I think it will become, and to use what the environmental appraisal describes as the "rat runs" of minor roads. That would create danger and havoc across Kent.

I am making a Kentish parochial speech. The people of Kent are lucky to live in one of the most beautiful corners of England. Dover and Kent have always been the gateway to the continent. We should not blame the people of Kent for standing up and trying to preserve their heritage. The Government must remember that, because it is important.

9.5 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): I certainly hope that when the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) meets the President of France in a few days time he will be more diplomatic about the nature of Socialism than the Secretary of State for Transport in his concluding remarks.

The right hon. Gentleman tried to downgrade the policies of the Left in relation to the public sector, but it is interesting to consider what we have learned tonight from the debate. The French Socialist Government and their publicly owned railway system was the first to offer lower fares and put a specific mark on how much lower they would be. French trains on the link will travel faster than ours—160 miles per hour rather than 100 miles per hour—which is of significance in the length of time for crossing the Channel. There is freer information from the French Government.

The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) told us that the French Socialist Government have published far more information on this issue and its direct and indirect effects than the British Government have. That was a point made by Conservative Members. The French Government's plans were prepared earlier and were more publicised than the Government's. The French Government have also offered something which is favoured by our Government, wider choice. There is a choice once one has crossed the Channel about where one can go. The striking thing about the French proposals is that one could take the train from Britain either to Paris or Brussels.

That is relevant in relation to the dispersal argument —the dispersal of the traffic after it has come through the chunnel. It is relevant to my constituents since the outlet terminus, the sole outlet terminus scheduled by the Government, for all the rail fixed link traffic is Waterloo. The dispersal argument is a very strong one. If we are to make effective use of this link we need to be able to bypass London, via Euston to the north-east, or via the new Snow hill tunnel when it is completed. For that traffic which has its destination in London there should have been serious consideration in the White Paper—there is no reference to the issue—of the night sleeper traffic going to White City or Olympia, for freight going to the docklands, and for passengers going to either Waterloo or Victoria. It will be possible to take a train for Paris or Brussels. Similarly it should be possible—I can see even now the indicator board flashing at the Gare du Nord—for one to learn that the next train will go either to Victoria or to Waterloo, or that it will go from Kings Cross through the new Snow hill tunnel to Birmingham, Durham and then Newcastle or from Kings Cross to Birmingham, Crewe and Glasgow.

If there is not this dispersal of traffic, and if the international rail traffic—as anticipated in a throwaway sentence in the White Paper — will outlet only at Waterloo, the commercial viability of the project, on which the Government pride themselves, will be profoundly qualified. The real advantage of rail over air is time and convenience. We all know from experience of the inconvenience of commuting to Paris or Brussels. We have to take a train, the tube or the car to Heathrow, where we have to wait before taking the aeroplane, and, on arrival, we have to take more transport to our final destination. A minimum of three legs is necessary in a journey from central London to central Paris.

We have heard much about rail versus sea, but if there is a real commercial advantage in rail versus air it will be as a result of being able to rest or work on a train without interruption, and to get off the train at the other end and leave the station immediately. But that is not what is proposed. What I have said about Waterloo are not local issues concerning the use of one station, but issues that concern the viability of the project.

What is the sense of taking three and a quarter hours on the train and then having to go through Customs as at an airport? That would profoundly undermine the attraction of the scheme. There are proposals, which I have here, for six new rail platforms and their extensions at Waterloo and for an entire new international terminal. It will be a double-decker arrangement over the concourse. However, it does not make sense. Its aesthetic attractiveness is one issue, but we must consider whether it will be any use to the millions of consumers, including those who go to the City via Waterloo, who use the station as a commuter station. They will find that part of the station is allocated exclusively to international trains—that part closest to the exit to Shell house, the City and the Bank link.

There will be congestion because passenger trains from Paris will arrive in the early morning and in the late evening. The Minister is indicating by facial expression—perhaps it is something else—that he is not sure. I am not sure of him because I have got no information on these matters from him, although I tabled a written parliamentary question. All of the signs are that the overnight sleeper link will arrive in the morning, and thus increase congestion. Congestion is of some relevance to the House. This is not an entirely facetious argument. Those who get on the train at Paris at the end of a normal working day will arrive in London at about 9.30 pm. Perhaps by the time that passengers have got out of the station and into other traffic, assuming that they do not have to go through Customs, as Customs formalities could be completed on the train, it will be 9.50 pm. Perhaps the Minister will assure us that the times will be different. Nevertheless, if the project is a success and there are many trains arriving in London in the late evening, there will be a problem.

Many hon. Members enjoy telling me that they are my constituents, and that they live in the Division Bell area. If the trains arrive at about 9.45 pm, the Division Bell area and property values in it might shrink. There are only two bridges for road traffic from Waterloo. Anybody who has gone across Waterloo bridge from Waterloo station knows that there is one underpass going north, but that to go to the west end down the Strand is a positive nightmare.

In practice, traffic leaving Waterloo turns left, goes around the traffic island next to County hall and comes over Westminster bridge. That is not an insignificant factor if we are to have road traffic links and bus services. The Minister has said nothing about buses. Will private contractors be able to pick up traffic at Waterloo? Such considerations must be examined.

Many of my constituents and I believe that those matters should be considered by a tried and tested means—a public inquiry. I have great sympathy for hon. Members with constituency interests, such as the hon. Member for Thanet, North and the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who have been steamrolled by the Government to agree the decision in principle.

Mr. Ridley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Waterloo station was built through the private hybrid Bill procedure?

Mr. Holland: The Secretary of State must do better than that. Is he aware that at the great event to take place in four days' time the President of France and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom will sign an agreement for traffic and French tourists to outlet exclusively at a station in London called Waterloo? What a victory for the entente cordiale. For the sake of common sense, give them the choice of going either to Victoria or Waterloo. But there are more important points to be made than on hybrid Bills.

The Government have not undertaken to set up a public inquiry. Although hon. Members who represent Kent have been steamrolled to get the principle of a Channel link passed so that construction work can start, there is plenty of time for proper public inquiry procedures to be undertaken into where traffic should outlet in London and elsewhere.

Environmental factors should also be considered. I have received extensive submissions from constituents that the local area could not sustain the traffic or take the strain. I hope to speak on Second Reading to take those points further.

9.16 pm

Sir John Osborn (Sheffield, Hallam): New capital projects, including the Channel tunnel, are surely what the construction and engineering industries, the north, and the Confederation of British Industry have been asking for to provide employment. Listening to the debate, it is clear that there is some truth in the observation that whenever a Government make a decision, the British people are good at providing every reason why its implementation is, at best, difficult, and, at worst, impossible. I have even received a letter from Sealink stressing the opinion poll view that once the road link had been abandoned, the public turned against the concept of a Channel tunnel at all.

I welcome the White Paper, and particularly the Government's choice. As joint chairman of the all-party Channel tunnel group, certainly at the December exhibition and conference at Lille, I have supported the fixed link, or ligne fixe. Despite the speeches of the right hon. Members for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) and for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I am convinced that the decision is good for Britain as a whole. It is, or could be, good for our industry, the midlands and the north. It is a challenge and an opportunity that I hope the country will grasp.

My hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Kent, including my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Couch), have given contradictory views about whether the link will take jobs from the area, especially from Dover and Folkestone, or bring new industries to its rural areas, ruining the environment and despoiling the countryside which, as a northerner, I have come to know and appreciate. From what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, I am convinced that the decision need not despoil Kent, or bring unwanted industries into the towns, alongside the main roads, the railway lines and motorways between the centre of Britain and the coast of Kent. As a northerner, I see no reason why Kent need have any more new industries than it wants. I want to see those industries come to the midlands and the north, and I want political

[Sir John Osborn]

and industrial leaders to take this opportunity to make sure that that happens. After all, there will be new industries stemming from creation of the tunnel, but already it is a fact that 60 per cent. of our exports go to the Community anyhow.

The British Rail-SNCF link could provide the opportunity for long-distance freight—I admit that that may be container traffic—to travel from Manchester to Milan on a regular basis. The EEC freight network—which is somewhat larger than ours because of the longer distances involved — could undoubtedly bring the midlands and northern industries nearer to their customers and markets. That will be a vital step forward, and it is an opportunity which must be welcomed and grasped.

During the debate in December 1985 the Euroroute and expressway were considered to have advantages. In reply to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Lewis), I said that I supported the solution put forward by the Channel Tunnel Group because that would do least harm to the Channel ports and I hoped that 50 per cent. of cross-Channel traffic would still be carried by sea. It would be least costly, take a lower volume of traffic to provide a return and give a faster passage.

In the debate inspired by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on the dangers of the expressway drive-through, I supported the concept of drive-through but was alarmed about safety, ventilation and the technology to achieve that. On the other hand, if the expressway could modify its original proposal from two to four tunnels, it occurred to me that there was no reason why the CTG should not start with rail and, if traffic demand increased to justify it, supplement the original two rail tunnels with an additional road tunnel. I believe it is better to start with known technology and to "walk before you run". A drive-through could be provided later.

Subsequently I was in favour of the drive-through being limited to cars, not heavy road vehicles. A 50-kilometre stretch of road does not strike me as being a good place for a mixture of heavy road vehicles and cars. The larger tunnel, having three lanes and perhaps a reserve or certainly laybys for heavy vehicles as well as cars, could be too wide for the narrow width of chalk for the tunnelling operation. Paragraph 16 of the White Paper deals with that. In the long term, I favour a drive-through for cars only. I hope that heavy vehicles will continue to use the shuttle or the ferries. That decision can be made when the first step has been taken.

As other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall withdraw my other comments, except to stress one final point. The Sheffield chamber of commerce has asked me to explain what orders are likely to come to the north of England over the next few years. The engineering requirements amount to £700 million. The need for pre-cast linings means that £130 million will go to the midlands and north of England. Cast-iron tunnel equipment will mean £30 million to the midlands and north-east England. Rolling stock would bring £120 million to the midlands and the north-west and electric locomotives would bring another £40 million. There are orders for the north in the short term, and the north and midlands could be brought nearer to their customers by a railway network which is proving itself elsewhere in Europe. I therefore welcome the decision taken by my right hon. Friend.

9.24 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I also welcome the Government's decision and regard the Channel tunnel as potentially the biggest boost for railways in Britain this century, following decades of neglect.

British Rail predicts that cross-Channel passenger traffic will jump from the present figure of 3 million a year to 9 million in the first year of the tunnel's operation as a result of self-generated traffic and as the reliability and price competitiveness of rail services divert passengers from air travel. These figures are based on conventional train speeds. By the year 2003, when new high-speed rail services will be open to Brussels and Paris, passenger traffic is expected to rise to an annual total of 11 million.

The Channel tunnel also gives British Rail enormous new potential in the international freight market. At present, international freight traffic represents only 2 per cent. of British Rail's freight business by comparison with 22 per cent. on German railways and 21 per cent. on French railways. Present cross-Channel carryings of freight are only about 2 million tonnes. British Rail estimates that 6 million tonnes of cross-Channel freight will be rail-borne at the end of the first year of operation at the end of 1993, rising to 7 million tonnes by the year 2003.

There is no doubt about these projected increases in rail passenger and freight carryings. The result will be faster and more frequent services to European destinations and this will appeal to the travelling public and British industry alike. The business man in Manchester will be able to load his freight on to wagons in Manchester and they can be offloaded at Duisberg, for example, without any difficulties stemming from crossing the Channel.

More services, the new build for freight and passenger trains, new terminals and additional maintenance requirements will mean more jobs in the railway industry. The Government must do two things to enable British Rail to seize this opportunity. First, they must ensure that the appropriate levels of capital investment are available to British Rail to carry out the necessary new build of rolling stock and infrastructure development. At the very least, there must be no constraints on British Rail's external financing limits for this work. The capital investment must be made in the United Kingdom.

Secondly, the Government must ensure that agreements are reached as speedily as possible with the Home Office and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to permit on train Customs and immigration facilities. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) replies he will assure us that he will do his best to ensure that those who are shadow Home Office Ministers will make certain that this is done if the Government cannot give us an assurance tonight.

What will the benefits be for employment? Combined British Rail and Channel Tunnel Group expenditure in the United Kingdom on equipment, materials and labour in the construction phase of the tunnel will be over £1 billion. This is an enormous opportunity for British industry. As the expenditure will be primarily on engineering and construction works, the traditional industrial regions can benefit the most. There is no reason to believe that the orders will be placed to any large extent outside the United Kingdom. In practice, British Rail will buy British, unless tenders are improbably low from abroad. The Government

must help British industry, and an assurance from the Minister of State on this score when he replies would be extremely welcome.

We want none of the dumping which has so often led British manufacturers to lose out on rail export contracts. For the CTG contracts, EEC competitive tendering rules will apply. Again, there is no reason to believe that British industry will be unable to compete effectively.

The CTG has maintained consistently that its expenditure in the construction phase will generate about 40,000 man years of direct employment in the United Kingdom. If we add to that figure the indirect employment that will be generated, there will perhaps be about 70,000 man years of employment. In addition, we shall have British Rail investment, which will provide many jobs and opportunities, mainly outside the south-east. It is clear that in the construction phase there are enormous benefits available to the north of England, Scotland and Wales, with Government help and if the Government wish.

I must disagree with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) about a parallel with Aberdeen and the oil industry. Aberdeen benefited from the oil industry, but so did the rest of the country when the oil came aboard. Unfortunately, the Government's economic mismanagement meant that all the oil revenue was spent on paying unemployment benefit, but that is another matter. If we have a Channel tunnel, it will benefit the south-east and the rest of the country.

If the economy were buoyant, we would not be talking in these terms. Unfortunately, the economy is not buoyant and we have problems and apprehensions about jobs. If the Government will it, we can benefit as a united country from the Channel tunnel project. I hope that it goes ahead without any impediment.

9.28 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am delighted to have the opportunity briefly to express my welcome for the scheme for the Channel tunnel. I am disappointed that the rail-only option has been taken, especially in view of the excitement and attractions of the Channel expressway, which was very much a latecomer to the scheme as a whole. If the lead time between the tender date and the date for a decision was too short to enable the Channel expressway to be assessed properly, the date for decision should have been extended. We may have been forced into this historic decision in something of a hurry to satisfy the electoral needs of the French Government.

There is no incentive for CTG ever to build the road link, and if every possible contender finds it difficult, because it has to wait to the year 2020, to put in the road scheme, that will not happen within the foreseeable future. It will be a bonus to Kent, and my constituency in the Medway towns, which has an unemployment rate of 17 per cent. I have sympathy for those hon. Members from the north and from Scotland who say that the scheme will siphon the employment from elsewhere down into Kent, but the Medway towns and other industrial parts of Kent are prepared and able to exploit this potential, which will be of advantage.

The M2 will be equally as important as the M20 as a route to the tunnel. The M2 will become so busy that it will cease to be the local bypass for the Medway towns and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) suggested, will make it imperative that a northern relief road for the Medway towns and a third crossing over the Medway be built soon.

9.30 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Although this has been a truncated debate, it has illustrated not only the depth of the cross-party support for the scheme but the depth of the cross-party opposition to it. I shall have some difficulty in reconciling all the views that have been expressed in the debate, but I think that I can take a majority of the House with me fairly early on when I refer to the contribution of the Secretary of State. If anybody was careful not to say anything about the consequences of the Channel link, it was the Secretary of State. He had his usual go at the Labour party and used the example of myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is sponsored by the National Union of Seamen. We have never made any secret about the fact that we have disagreed over the desirability of such a link.

The Secretary of State had a go at the Liberal party and saw contradictions there. I cannot answer for it, and none of its members is present. I thought that the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) set out as honestly as he could what he felt, but who knows about the rest of the Liberal party—then again, who cares?

When the Secretary of State makes such attacks, he overlooks a major point about which we had to tick him off at Question Time only last week. We all know, because he has said so on several occasions, that the right hon. Gentleman opposes all schemes for a Channel tunnel link. He shakes his head, but for years he has opposed all such links. The Prime Minister took him to Lille the other week, and then sent him home like the old-fashioned post office telegram boy to tell the House of Commons what she had decided. The right hon. Gentleman had to do his duty. He arrived without having had his lunch and delivered the, for him, unwelcome message that the Channel Tunnel Group scheme had been chosen and it was up to him, as the Secretary of State, to find enough excuses to justify the choice and the public resources to cater for the demand that such a choice would make on British Rail.

The Secretary of State had some sport—I make no complaint about that—with the Opposition's amendment. I concede that it is fairly detailed, but we feel, or at least those of us who have the slightest glimmer of hope on the Channel link feel, that the detailed nature of our amendment amply illustrates the fears expressed from both sides of the House about the likely economic consequences of a Channel tunnel link and its impact not only on the south-east but on all other regions.

I said earlier that it lies beyond my abilities as an orator, poor though they may be, to convince right hon. and hon. Members who are completely against the fixed link. My prospects of convincing my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) are about equal to the prospects of Berwick Rangers winning the Scottish cup. He said that the scheme will have an impact upon the economic imbalance between the south-east of England and the rest of the United Kingdom, but acceptance of the Channel Tunnel Group scheme or any other scheme is irrelevant to the economic imbalance. Those who are opposed to the fixed link have an obligation to tell the House how the economic imbalance will be improved

[Mr. Peter Snape]

without the scheme. I sympathise with and understand the view that a better use could be found for the £1 billion that is to be put into this scheme.

I served upon the Standing Committee that considered the last Channel tunnel Bill.

Mr. Boyes: That was in 1926.

Mr. Snape: No, it was not in 1926. My hon. Friend must get it right. It was in 1975.

The objection of many of my hon. Friends then was that better use could be made of public money than by spending it upon a Channel tunnel. I did not agree at that time with my hon. Friends and I do not agree with them now, but I understand their point of view. However, the House is aware that this fixed link will not involve public money. Therefore, my hon. Friends presumably wish the £1 billion of private sector capital to be spent in other directions. However, that choice is not open to us. We have no control over the expenditure of private sector capital. I fear that if it were not to be spent upon the fixed link, it would not be spent upon the deprived regions of the United Kingdom.

We have to decide, therefore, whether the scheme that has been chosen by the Prime Minister can remotely be defended. The Government have missed an opportunity. They should have set out the economic advantages of the scheme for the rest of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) let the cat out of the bag when he referred to the amount of information that is available to electors on the other side of the Channel. The French Government have set out in detail the impact of the scheme on the French economy, particularly upon that part of France which most closely abuts the entrance and the exit to the new Channel link. Why have our Government not done the same? This Government do not believe in the kind of planning that the French Government have long since embraced.

The Secretary of State had the cheek to tell us that this will be a wonderful, capitalist tunnel. It was a somewhat exotic phrase, even for him. Presumably the tunnel changes halfway under the Channel and becomes a wonderful Socialist tunnel, although I do not suppose the fact that President Mitterrand is a Socialist has ever entered his head.

The right hon. Gentleman referred earlier to what he called the inherent conservatism of the British people which he said was already being shown by the fact that they are writing letters objecting to the proposals. Again, he rather condemns himself from his own lips, because if there were a typical Conservative it would be the right hon. Gentleman. It is not his fault that he is the second son of Viscount Ridley and was educated at Eton and Balliol, but there are comparatively few Left-wing Socialists with such a background.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I have not finished yet. I am not in a position to know about the right hon. Gentleman's friends, but I have not met too many Left-wing Socialists who are so educated, so if ever there were a typical Conservative it is the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ridley: I only want to remind the hon. Gentleman that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was my fag at Eton.

Mr. Snape: All I can say is that it must have been that experience that drove my hon. Friend into the Campaign Group. I cannot think of a better reason.

The fact that our amendment is couched in the way that it is is also due to the fact that the Government have transparently failed to show how the so-called economic benefits can be fairly spread throughout the country. Indeed, according to the White Paper, there is no compulsion, there is not even an attempt at persuasion, to ensure that the large amount of capital expenditure to which the Channel Tunnel Group is committed will be spent within the United Kingdom. Yet a great deal of capital expenditure could, should and, one would hope, will be spent within the United Kingdom. I hope that when he replies the Minister will give us some definite assurances that that will happen. After all, the Channel Tunnel Group is talking about an expenditure of about £300 million on rolling stock.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Govan and others have talked about the plight of British Rail Engineering Limited and my right hon. Friend specifically referred to the future of Springburn. Nothing in the White Paper or the Government's proposals gives a shred of assurance for Springburn. They do nothing for the future of Swindon or Doncaster. The British Rail engineering workshops are being divided before privatisation and it is the Government's intention, with typical cynicism, to dispose of many employees of British Rail Engineering Limited before the orders for the work on this scheme are laid.

We are seeing the Government's usual cynicism. The redundancy payments for those who work in British Rail Engineering Limited will be picked up by the public sector. The taxpayer will be responsible for paying off skilled craftsmen throughout the country. Yet we know from the details that can be gleaned from the White Paper that the hundreds of millions of pounds worth of orders which will result from the Channel Tunnel Group scheme will go to a privatised British Rail Engineering Limited and those orders will benefit the private sector while the public sector will be left to pick up the bill. That is the reason for the cynicism that is being expressed by Labour Members. I hope that even at this late hour the Minister will say something about the future of those thousands of men and women within British Rail Engineering Limited who, regardless of the scheme, are facing redundancy.

The aspects on which the Government have failed to reassure any of us extend to substantial orders for BR. Where in the White Paper are there any details of the places from which rolling stock orders will emerge? There is talk about the Government's pricing policy and there are well-meaning hints about potential, but a Government who are prepared to tolerate the enormous decline in manufacturing industry that this Government have positively encouraged since 1979 are surely not to be trusted without specific details on BR's ordering policies.

Who is to build the 20 high-speed trains, the 400 freightliner wagons and the extra freight locomotives, wagons and coaches and who is to provide the electrics for the electrification schemes and the steel needed to meet the commitment for the large marshalling yard at Ashford? Who will construct—I refer to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland)—the new international terminal at Waterloo? What guarantee do we have that the scheme will benefit British railways and engineering nationwide? We seek reassurance.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the benefits to British Rail freight that link will bring about. Will the Minister of State give assurances on the extension of section 8 grants?

The Minister of State, Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Just give me the time.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman was the first to throw away the time available. He wants to say as little as possible. Whatever he says, it will probably be more than the Secretary of State, but I do not know whether he will say it as elegantly as his colleague. Is there to be an extension of section 8 grants to enable British Rail freight to take advantage of the long-haul and through freight trains that the CTG scheme should in all conscience bring?

In some ways, the debate has crossed party lines. One does not often hear encouragement such as we heard from the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) in demanding much greater investment in BR. We hope that he will join us in two weeks at Transport Question Time when he can put these matters to the Secretary of State. He can bring his colleague the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who spoke of the failure of BR management to reduce fares and therefore fill trains. It is difficult—I shall say this slowly because I can say it only once and I hope that the hon. Member for Mid-Kent will understand me—to reduce fares and fill trains when faced with a Government who have been anxious for years to reduce the amount of money available to BR, especially under a Secretary of State who took £200 million out of BR's investment base. I hope that Conservative Members will turn up a little more often at Transport Question Time to put these points fairly and squarely.

The Opposition have tabled their amendment because they want assurances. We need better assurances on the future of British manufacturing industry, especially from the Secretary of State. I am not knocking the Minister of State, but I know that, if the assurances are not written down on his papers, we shall not get them. If we do not get assurances, I urge my colleagues to go into the Lobby to support the Opposition's amendment.

9.48 pm

The Minister of State, Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): We have had a valuable debate in which hon. Members on both sides of the House have clearly expressed their views. A number of hon. Members, including my colleagues from south and east Kent, have expressed their anxieties and asked me questions. I shall seek to reply to those questions before turning to the negative and carping Opposition amendment which signally failed to rise to the occasion and in good measure contradicted what was said by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who said that a Labour Government would continue this project.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) clearly misunderstood the purpose and method of operation of the consultative committee, which I shall chair, which will meet in Kent with local authorities and the Channel Tunnel Group. It is intended to seek ways to minimise the damage caused locally by the construction and to maximise the benefits by agreement between the promoters and the public authorities.

I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he sought, that those who make representations to the committee will not affect their ability to be petitioners against the Bill. The hon. Gentleman also asked about the resources available to British Rail. I assure him that we plan to give British Rail an EFL sufficient to cover its commercially viable investment, which is what is involved in this project.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): On the subject of rail investments, will my hon. Friend say if and when British Rail will have the resources necessary to widen the loading gauge so that through container traffic from all parts of the United Kingdom will be able to use the tunnel? That is crucial to the rail freight argument.

Mr. Mitchell: I assure my hon. Friend that that is something which British Rail is planning.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Rees) asked whether the committee would meet in Kent other than in Maidstone. I assure him that we intend to move around the county. He mentioned the problem of Shakespeare cliff. I can again assure him that that is a matter that we will consider carefully in committee and with the promoters. He also asked about jobs. I shall deal with that point separately.

My right hon. and learned Friend asked for three assurances. The first was about predatory pricing. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission can deal with that point under the Fair Trading Act 1973. He also asked how quickly the Office of Fair Trading would deal with a problem. It can react quickly and carry out an assessment of a problem if one arises.

The right hon. Member for Deptford, Lewisham (Mr. Silkin) asked about spoil dumping at sea and whether it would kill the spawning fish in the English Channel. That matter will be covered by the work of my consultation committee. In no circumstances would we allow the spawning grounds to be damaged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) asked about the trunking of Thanet Way. We are consulting Kent county council about that matter, and I shall see that the consultative committee covers that point. He mentioned, as did other hon. Members, a document produced by the French Government about their intended investment in the Pas de Calais. He asked whether we could have a similar document in the United Kingdom. We have that in the White Paper, the statements that have been made in the House, the questions that have been answered and the speeches that have been made in the debates. Drawing all those matters together in one document might be helpful to hon. Members. I will consider that point carefully.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) asked about Customs, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson). I agree that it is desirable that Customs and Excise formalities should if possible be carried out on the trains. We are discussing with the Customs and Excise what is needed to satisfy its requirements.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall and other hon. Members asked about the hybrid Bill procedure. I shall not go over the arguments about that again. The House has already well debated them. However, I have today written to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who has been in his place throughout the debate, and who is assiduous in representing his constituents' views. I have set out in full

[Mr. Mitchell]

the procedure which applies to a hybrid Bill and informed him of the opportunities for consultation and objection available to those of his constituents who wish to take advantage of them. I will place a copy of that letter in the Library. I intend, in addition, to produce a layman's guide in the form of a simple leaflet so that his constituents and others who are affected may be aware of what it involves

A civil engineering project of this size, as with any other major project, is bound to have an effect on the environment. There will be damaging local effects and wider national benefits. As the House is aware, I will chair in Kent a committee consisting of local authorities, the Department of the Environment and the promoters. We shall be looking at ways of carrying the project through with a minimum of practical damage to the environment. I recognise that that has particular and unique effects on Shepway and it is my intention to seek an invitation as soon as possible to meet the council to discuss the effects.

However, it is not only in Shepway that there will be environmental effects. For years, environmental groups have been pressing for more goods to go by rail. Now those groups have got what they want because the Channel tunnel will provide a rail link between the United Kingdom rail network and the whole of the continental rail network. It will provide the opportunity for substantially more goods to go by rail than in the past. Susan Hoyle, the director of Transport 2000, said that the CTG scheme offers the best opportunity since the war for a major renaissance by British Rail. The House knows that the longer the distance, the better prospects British Rail has of competing successfully. We should certainly see an environmental benefit from freight going by rail rather than road.

I have been questioned on jobs. If the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) had left me more time, I could have dealt more effectively with that subject. For the next six years there will be more jobs on the ferries because trade is growing, more jobs in the Kent area because of the construction of the tunnel, more jobs in other parts of the country because they will have orders for engineering works, for British Rail work and for the merry-go-round to go on the train. All of that is a net benefit.

When the tunnel opens, there will be a short-term loss of about 1,600 jobs in Dover, but after that there will be a resumption of growth both in jobs and traffic on the ferries, which will mean that after 10 years there will be about 2,000 more jobs than at present. There will be huge opportunities for other parts of the country to compete more successfully because we will be able to get our goods more cheaply, efficiently and reliably into our export markets on the continent.

I turn to the Opposition amendment, and I do so with relish. It contains six carping criticisms. It complains that the Government have not published the full terms of the treaty and protocols. I see the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East nodding. The Opposition must know that it is not normal to do so in advance of signature of a treaty. No Governments do that and the previous Labour Government did not do it. There is no reason why we should depart from the established practice in that respect.

The amendment also refers to there being no Government commitment to finance British Rail. There is no need for the Government to finance British Rail when it is doing something which is commercially viable and can raise the money out of its own resources. The Government will ensure that its external financing limit poses no problems for this investment.

The carping amendment complains about the effect on jobs. As I have just explained, there will be benefits for jobs in Kent and other parts of the country and there will be benefits for jobs when the Channel tunnel is open. I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House should take note of the substantial advantages when British industry is not suffering from the disadvantage of having to drag all its imports across the Channel, and having to send all its exports with double handling at each port end because it could not get them into the export markets. I am convinced, and I believe that the House will agree, that the opportunity for increased competitiveness by British industry makes many thousands of jobs more secure than they would otherwise have been.

The amendment attacks the Government for not having set up a public inquiry. I have already explained to the House that if we had a public inquiry it would mean that the Secretary of State would appoint an inspector and the inspector would carry out an inquiry and report to the Secretary of State, who would take the decision in private. That decision would be binding, whereas now the highest tribunal in the land—the House of Commons—is able to decide the issues. It is laughable to suggest that there is a lack of consumer choice.

I heartily commend the project to the House. It will provide a faster, more reliable and cheaper link with the continent.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 173, Noes 263.

Division No. 64] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John

Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E.
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*

Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. Francis Maude.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put:—
The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 107.

Division No. 65] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gyllis, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lambie, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*

Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Gale, Roger
Garrett, W. E.
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moate, Roger
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Ryman, John
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Max Madden and
Mr. Dave Nellist.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

This this House approves the Government's White paper on the Channel Fixed Link (Cmnd. 9735).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Australia Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. — *[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Orders of the Day

AUSTRALIA BILL *[LORDS]*

Considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Inner London Education Authority (Precept Limitation)

10.27 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I beg to move,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

This order limits the precept which may be made for the financial year 1986-87 by the new Inner London education authority which takes over from the old ILEA on 1 April 1986. A shadow authority—the Inner London interim education authority is responsible for issuing this precept. Under the Local Government Act 1985, the new ILEA is automatically designated for precept limitation for the first three years of its existence—from 1986-87 to 1988-89. Because it is, in effect, a single service authority, I am responsible for this limitation. Its purpose is to protect ratepayers from high rates caused by high spending. Lower business rates also protect jobs. Although ILEA is automatically designated, it would, in view of its expenditure, have come well within the criteria for selective rate capping this year. Its 1985-86 budget was 5 per cent. above its expenditure target, itself related to the authority's past spending, and 70 per cent. above GRE.

I shall describe briefly the processes leading to this draft order. The Government have not reached a quick or sudden decision. Consideration began in July last year when I announced my intention to propose an expenditure level for the new ILEA for 1986-87 of £902 million. I confirmed that figure in September, as soon as the interim ILEA was established. At the end of October, the interim ILEA applied for a redetermined expenditure level, citing a range of £995 million to £1,025 million. I considered its case, and in December redetermined the expenditure level at £915 million. My conclusions were based on judgments which differed sharply from those of the interim ILEA in three main areas. First and most important, I took the view that the volume of the ILEA's expenditure should be substantially reduced. Secondly, I believed that the abolition of the GLC need not substantially increase ILEA's central administrative costs above its already high levels. Thirdly, I used the Government's forecast of inflation next year at 4·5 per cent. rather than the significantly higher figure favoured by the interim ILEA. In the event, I added £13 million to the expenditure level for largely technical reasons, but did not agree to make the substantial increase which the interim ILEA requested to maintain its expenditure at its present level.

Following the redetermination of the expenditure level, I proposed a precept maximum of 76·5p, also in December. That proposed precept maximum was derived from the redetermined expenditure level and from an assessment of the reserves available to the authority. It implied drawing down £39 million from reserves to relieve the precept.

In January, the interim ILEA refused the proposed precept maximum of 76·5p, and presented further evidence in support of a substantially higher precept. I examined all the evidence afresh, including further representations from the ILEA, and decided that it would be appropriate to assume the drawing of slightly less from reserves in support of the precept. Therefore, I invited the interim ILEA to agree to a precept maximum of 77·25p, which was based on the same redetermined expenditure level of £915 million, but assumed the drawing of only £31 million from reserves.

The interim ILEA has refused to accept the new figure. In the absence of agreement, I decided to lay the draft order embodying a figure of 77·25p, which is now before the House. I did that because I wanted to establish a final precept maximum before the date of 15 February set out in the Rates Act 1984, in order to end uncertainty and to give the interim ILEA time to draw up a budget consistent with the precept maximum. At the same time, I made it clear to the interim ILEA that my door was open for further discussions.

This afternoon I met members of the interim ILEA. They proposed to me that we should agree on a precept maximum of 80·75p. That would be an increase of some 4·5 per cent. above the ILEA precept for 1985-86. It could be used to finance a budget of some £950 million, if about £27 million were drawn from reserves. Such a budget would be some £45 million less than the interim ILEA has previously claimed that it needs to spend. I have carefully considered that proposition. However, I have told the ILEA that I do not believe that extra expenditure of £35 million above the expenditure level which I redetermined in December would be necessary to maintain existing standards of education in inner London. Nor do I believe that the ratepayer should be asked to pay 4·5 per cent. more in 1986-87. Therefore, my judgment remains that the precept maximum of 77·25p embodied in the draft order is appropriate. I shall now explain why I consider the precept maximum of 77·25p to be appropriate, in terms both of the level of expenditure which it implies and of the effect on the ratepayer.

The ILEA has to contend with grave problems in discharging its duties to educate the people of inner London. The Government have never denied that. Our own assessments of cost allow for the extra costs imposed by concentrations of ethnic minorities, one-parent families, bad housing conditions and family poverty. But the ILEA spends far more than other inner city authorities. Even allowing for the extra cost of salaries in London, it has been spending some 30 per cent. more per pupil than Manchester, Liverpool or Newcastle, and some 60 per cent. more per pupil than Birmingham. ILEA's pupil-teacher ratios are markedly more generous than the average for other inner city authorities. The differences between ILEA and others in non-teaching staff ratios are even more marked. Very large capitation allowances and a perverse charging policy also swell the authority's expenditure. It is unique among LEAs in having held its school meal charge at 35p since 1980.

The ILEA cannot justify this extra cost to the ratepayer in terms of the quality of its service. The evidence suggests that, when account is taken of pupils' circumstances, the attainment of pupils in ILEA schools is no better than that of pupils in comparable inner city authorities. The fact is that the ILEA has not made effective use of the huge sums which it has levied from its ratepayers. Let me give an example. The most important asset for any LEA is a well-managed teacher force of good quality, properly deployed. But the ILEA has allowed surplus teachers to accumulate on the staffs of its schools. That is not good either for the work of the schools or the morale of the teachers.

The Government have made clear over a number of years their wish to see lower expenditure by the ILEA. Pupil numbers have fallen by more than 20 per cent. in six years, but over the same period the authority's expenditure has been more or less steady in real terms. Its teacher force has indeed reduced but at much less than in proportion to pupil numbers so that pupil-teacher ratios have improved by 12·5 per cent. from the generous levels of 1978-79. Instead of using even the small saving in teacher numbers to reduce the burden on the ratepayer, the authority has added it back elsewhere in its budget.

My expenditure level implied a 6 per cent. reduction in the volume of ILEAs expenditure. It cannot seriously be claimed that such a cut would of itself put at risk the authority's performance of its statutory duties. Expenditure per pupil would still be more than 20 per cent. above that of Manchester, Liverpool or Newcastle. More serious perhaps is the ILEA claim that the movement all at once to the lower level of expenditure would cause serious disruption. I assure the House that other local education authorities have achieved reductions from one year to the next of 6 per cent. and achieved them from a base level of expenditure much lower than the ILEA's. But the ILEA has argued——

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: I would rather not do so. I shall ask the House to allow me to reply at the end of the debate and I shall take questions then. I want to read this carefully prepared explanation of why I am imposing a precept maximum on the ILEA. I shall answer questions at the end of the debate, subject to the House giving me leave to reply.

The ILEA has argued that those other authorities took longer to prepare their reductions and that it cannot be expected to achieve a 6 per cent. reduction in 1986-87 starting from now. I ask the House to assess the worth of that argument in the light of what the authority has done since Parliament first gave the Government powers to limit rates and precepts.

There has been ample time to undertake a planned and managed reduction of its expenditure in response to Government policies. The expenditure level set for 1985-86 implied substantial reductions. The authority chose to take no action, but to rely upon its limited reserves to keep up spending. The expenditure level for 1986-87 has been known since July; but, instead of planning towards a budget in line with it, the interim ILEA spent months drawing up a budget at constant volume, so the ILEA has made its own task harder. Notwithstanding that, the Government have concluded that so high is ILEA's present level of expenditure that a volume reduction of 6 per cent. is practicable and attainable even from a standing start. I am satisfied that it remains appropriate to ask for that.

Mr. Hughes *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: In reaching my conclusions, I also had regard to the impact on ratepayers. Rate bills in inner London are high. Much of that is accounted for by the ILEA precept. The average domestic ratepayer is paying a sum approaching £250 a year on top of what he pays for the services of his local borough, the Metropolitan police and LRT. The average shop is paying about £1,500, and the average office £11,000. Large commercial enterprises, of course face much larger bills. In total, the burden of the ILEA on inner London ratepayers is almost £900 million a year.

The ratepayer should be protected from further increases. The precept maximum incorporated in the draft order represents a standstill on the ILEA precept for 1985-86, so the average ratepayer should pay the same in cash as he paid in 1985-86. In contrast, the sort of figures considered by the interim ILEA—and which I do not doubt it would have imposed but for precept limitation —would have entailed an increase in the precept of some 16 per cent. That would have meant another £40 for the average domestic ratepayer, £250 for the average shop and £1,750 for the average office. Ratepayers should not have to pay in this way for the expansion of an already extravagant service.

That is why this draft order has been laid before the House, and that is why I ask the House to approve it.

10.40 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The Opposition will be voting against the order, because that is the only way open to us to express our opposition to the level of precept that the Secretary of State is imposing on ILEA.

It is wrong in principle for a Secretary of State to impose by order on the citizens of inner London his diktat on the maximum that should be spent on education. It is one thing for central Government to have a view on the minimum standards, although the Government remained disappointingly silent when the inadequacies of the Somersets, the Herefords and Worcestershires, the Kents and the like have been exposed by the Secretary of State's advisers, the HMI. It is quite another for central Government to impose their will on maximum standards of provision, as under the order.

It is ironic that this Secretary of State, who has spoken and written so much about the overmighty state, should in practice be the Minister who has assumed the most extensive centralising powers. He obviously believes the dictum that Elizabeth house knows best. In this case, Elizabeth house not only does not know best, but has little idea of the likely impact of the cut being imposed on ILEA.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Radice: I shall not give way, as I should like to develop my speech.

The reality, as the Secretary of State knows, is that ILEA is already planning to make savings of around £18 million, as a consequence of falling rolls and improved efficiency. Even the Secretary of State admits that the consequence of the imposing of the precept of 77·25p in the pound will mean volume cuts of 6 per cent., or £55 million in the coming year. The scale of cuts is likely to be considerably greater. First, ILEA believes that the Department has underestimated by £13 million the extra cost of setting up the new education authority. Secondly, it is clear that the 4·5 per cent. that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, which he is assuming for pay and price increases in the coming year, does not take account of the spill-over effect of the provisional teacher's settlement for this year—which I remind the House is end-loaded to 8·5 per cent.—or of the manual workers' settlement.

[Mr. Radice]

If we look a year ahead, we see that the Secretary of State has often told the House about his offer of Government money for a deal on structure and conditions of service, but if such a settlement is reached the Inner London education authority will not benefit because it does not receive rate support grant. Indeed, it stands to lose because it will be bound by any agreement that may be reached. In other words, a long-term settlement next year would, in ILEA's case, be at the expense of further cuts. Is the Secretary of State aware of this? As he is to answer questions at the end of the debate, he might care to write down that one.

The Secretary of State has argued that the kind of contingencies to which I have referred will be fully covered by ILEA's balances, but, as Maurice Stonefrost, the clerk to the authority, pointed out in a letter to Sir David Hancock, the permanent secretary at the Department of Education and Science, the level of balances assumed to be satisfactory by the DES are, in his professional judgment, dangerously low. In fact, there is a real danger that the authority would be faced, in the words of Maurice Stonefrost, with

"a deficit financing position in its budget process."

In other words, it could run out of money during the coming year. Are this Government and this Secretary of State trying to impose an illegal budget on ILEA? I should like the Secretary of State to answer that question, too.

The consequences of even the level of cuts envisaged by the Secretary of State are likely to be extremely disruptive. The highly respected ILEA education officer, William Stubbs—I do not know whether the Secretary of State has ever run an education authority, so I should prefer to take the education officer's word against his, if he does not mind—has told Sir David Hancock that this scale of reductions would mean that the authority would be able to replace only one in three of any staff who leave the service in 1986-87. He said:

"It can be forecast with certainty that these vacancies would not occur evenly and many schools and colleges would be unable to replace key members of staff during the course of the financial year. Not only would curtailment of the education service become inevitable, but the maintenance of adequate standards of provision would be put at risk."

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: No, I should like to finish this quotation. I shall then give way. Mr. Stubbs then said:

"I would have to advise of the probability of the service breaking down in some areas, with the authority being unable to guarantee to fulfil at all times the whole range of its statutory obligations, leading to the near certainty of legal challenge for such failure to comply with its duties."

Again, are this Government trying to force ILEA to ignore its statutory obligations and to act illegally? I shall now give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Marlow: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He knows that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is referring to a 6 per cent. cut in expenditure. The hon. Gentleman says that it may be a little more than that; he may say that there will be a 10 per cent. cut in expenditure. ILEA spends roughly twice as much on primary school pupils as is spent upon primary school pupils in my constituency. My right hon. Friend has said that even allowing for London weighting this is 50 per cent. more than the average, and it is 30 per cent. more than is spent in Newcastle upon Tyne and 20 per cent. more than is spent in Birmingham. [HON. MEMBERS: "60 per cent."] Yes, 60 per cent. more than is spent in Birmingham. How on earth does the hon. Gentleman justify this vast level of extravagance by ILEA, even after the cuts?

Mr. Radice: ILEA is one of the few authorities which the Secretary of State's own advisers, Her Majesty's inspectorate, believe is spending up to the right kind of levels.

In that context it should be highly significant to the Secretary of State that even the London chamber of commerce and industry is concerned that cuts of that magnitude should not be compressed into one year, as the Secretary of State is trying to do.

Given the advice being offered to him, not only by respected officers of ILEA but by London business men and industrialists, the onus is on him to prove that such cuts will not harm or disrupt the education of Londoners, and he has not proved that tonight.

To any fair-minded person, it is frankly bizarre that the Government propose to cut at least £55 million in one year at a time when above all ILEA needs stability. The damage that has already been done to children's education by the teachers' dispute will in ILEA's case, be greatly compounded by the disruption of making the Secretary of State's cuts. The tragedy is that at a time when "firm and efficient management"—the Secretary of State's words—ought to be concentrated on establishing the new service and on raising standards in inner London, it will have to be spent on implementing cuts.

In that connection, let me quote a letter from the vice-chair of the parents' central consultative committee of ILEA. I believe that he has written to the Secretary of State tonight and that the letter has been endorsed by the chairs of all the parents' consultative committees of ILEA at a meeting earlier this evening. He says:

"Many of us remember what you"—

the Secretary of State—

"told parents at Central Hall on 10th May 1984."—

I was at that meeting, so I can remember too.

"'The Government of the day will judge what can reasonably be expected as a reduction in ILEA's spending without damaging the quality of education, and that is the assurance I can give you.'

It is the judgment of the Authority's most senior officers that, in fact, the reduction expected (indeed, demanded) would not only damage the quality of education, but could lead to the breakdown of the service during the course of the year.

The ILEA has demonstrated its willingness to make savings that do not damage children's education, and we know that the judgment of these officers is based on a intimate knowledge of all the relevant facts. We therefore feel that there is an overwhelming obligation upon you to reconsider the decision you have made.

It is quite clear that, unless the maximum precept is raised from the proposed 77·25p, the Authority is likely to be in an impossible situation before the end of the year.

Whilst your judgment contradicts that of those responsible for running the ILEA's services, we feel that—in order to lend any credibility to your assurance of May '84—there is also an overwhelming obligation upon you to explain to parents (whose views you have so often claimed to respect) the reasoning behind your judgment, and to demonstrate that the quality of our children's education will not be damaged by the reduction you propose."

If the Secretary of State will not answer our questions, he might at least answer the points put to him by London parents.

But, of course, the Secretary of State has heard all those facts before. Throughout the past two months he has learnt

them from ILEA officials and councils. On Friday he heard them from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and myself when he met us at Elizabeth house.

Only a few hours ago, as the Secretary of State has told us, ILEA's leader, Mrs. Frances Morrell, and other ILEA councillors met with him to discuss compromise proposals by which the maximum precept would be raised to 80·75p. This would require the authority to contain within its budget the additional cost it faces in 1986-87 over and above the general rate of inflation.

ILEA accepts that it needs to control costs, but the Secretary of State is not prepared to give anything. His only response has been to raise the maximum precept by a marginal amount, as he has had to admit. We reject his approach to London's education and the nation's education. It is true that ILEA spends more than other education authorities, and so it should. On almost every count, ILEA has more to cope with—seven out of 10 of the most disadvantaged boroughs are in inner London; the population density is 10 times the national average; the number of one-parent families is twice the national average; the number of children taking school meals is twice the national average; and the number of children speaking English as a second language is four times the national average. Despite those problems, ILEA has massive achievements to its credit—extensive nursery provision, a good pupil-teacher ratio, generous provision for pupils with special needs and the most extensive adult education service in the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State usually points to examination results. I think that he would have been a little more generous if he had said that the results in 1983 were the best since 1978 and that progress was maintained in 1984. Of course, as the Hargreaves, Thomas and Fish reports show, much more needs to be done in London education, as in the rest of the United Kingdom. I should have thought, as would most fair-minded people, that the creation of a directly elected authority would be an exciting opportunity to improve further the educational prospects for London's children. Instead, the Secretary of State, with his singular combination of ideological obsession and executive incompetence, typically plans to add to the chaos he has already created. Such recklessness can come only from a Minister who knows that his days are numbered.

It would be better for the Secretary of State and, more importantly, for the nation's education if he were to go now before he does any further damage. Whatever happens to the right hon. Gentleman, there is a ray of hope—Londoners will have the opportunity to say what they think about the Government's educational policies in the coming ILEA elections, which will be the first education election for a century, and in the coming Fulham by-election. I am confident what the people's verdict will be.

10.58 pm

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has repeated some of the current crop of ILEA scare stories about the irreparable damage that will be done to London education because of these proposals. I think that we would be justified in inviting the hon. Gentleman to remember that, about this time last year, the same prophecies of doom and gloom were emanating from county hall about the irreparable damage done by last year's expenditure limits, and none of them has been borne out.

Only days ago, the controlling group on ILEA was suggesting that if ILEA could not spend £995 million, irreparable damage would be done. Now, apparently £950 million is enough to stop irreparable damage from being done. The amount has fallen by approximately £45 million in about 48 hours.

The question to which the hon. Member for Durham, North singularly failed to address himself—and whoever sums up for the Opposition must address this question—is: why does it cost 60 per cent. more on a unit cost basis to educate a child in an ILEA secondary school than it costs in Birmingham, and 40 per cent. more than in some outer London boroughs? *[Interruption.]*

I do not know what the hon. Member for Durham, North said from his sedentary position, but if he is saying that it costs more to do things and there are more problems in central London, we would agree. But are there 60 per cent. more problems in central London than there are in Birmingham?

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the costs of the Metropolitan police are disproportionately greater than the costs of the police in areas outside London? So it is with the costs of the ILEA.

Mr. Maples: I was not aware of that. I should not have thought that the same considerations would apply to education. If what the hon. Gentleman says is true, it may be an argument for reducing the costs of the Metropolitan police, not for increasing the costs of education.

The hon. Gentleman and the Labour party have consistently failed to address the question: why does it cost so much more? Last year expenditure was reduced by 4 or 5 per cent., and none of those adverse consequences occurred. It is not credible to suggest that a further 4 or 5 per cent. reduction this year will result in irreparable damage. My right hon. Friend has it about right. It is reasonable to ask that expenditure should stay at about the same in cash terms.

The ILEA is putting about serious scare stories regarding the consequences of this measure, as it did last year, and that is worrying parents a great deal. It would help if my right hon. Friend would itemise the differences between authorities such as Birmingham and London, and show how savings could be made in a way which will not damage education. We know that they can be made.

There are considerable differences in staffing ratios, charges for some adult education courses and expenditure on property and property maintenance in ILEA. Therefore, considerable savings can be made. I invite my right hon. Friend to go into those matters in a little more detail so that parents will realise that the authority can make modest savings without damaging education.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The hon. Gentleman's constituents and mine have to contribute through their taxes to other children around the country, but they have to fund the entire education service of inner London through their rates. How does he justify that difference?

Mr. Maples: I was coming to that point. Now that the ILEA is rate capped, it is difficult to justify the fact that it does not receive any rate support grant. The target and penalty system was designed to encourage local authorities to spend less—*[Interruption.]* It would probably help

[Mr. Maples]

me to make the point if I were not subject to barracking from the Opposition. Despite the fact that I believe that the ILEA could make some modest savings without damaging education, it could not cut its expenditure to the point where it would receive any of this grant. If I remember the figures correctly, it would have to cut its expenditure by about £250 million to £300 million before it started to receive grant. It would have to reduce its expenditure to under £500 million to receive its full entitlement to rate support grant.

I should like my right hon. Friend to discuss with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, now that ILEA has been rate capped and its total expenditure is under control and public expenditure nationally has been brought under control, it is unreasonable that it should receive no rate support grant. It is the only local education authority which does not receive any.

All of us, including Opposition Members, would like to see the ILEA receive the maximum possible value for money. One of the ways of achieving that would be to delegate far more control of expenditure, the budget and the budget management to schools, and to bypass the county hall-ILEA bureaucracy as much as possible.

I have tried out that idea on a few heads in my constituency, and almost without exception they have welcomed it and asked to be given the chance to try. If that is too radical to be implemented, on the basis that one should never do anything radical for the first time, we could perhaps try it with a few schools where it is felt that their make-up and size and the quality of the head could make some such system work. It would enable money to be spent in a particular school in a way which related to the needs of that school as perceived by the head, the staff and the governors—the people who are close to where the effect of those decisions will be felt—not at county hall.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the alternative use of resources by schools—money which has been spent at the discretion of heads in consultation with staff — has been a satisfactory scheme, the bureaucracy at county hall having been kept out of it?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend gives a good example, but the AUR programmes in most schools represent a very small part of the money spent on the schools. It seems to me that that principle can be radically extended to give a particular school the total amount of money which is to be spent on that school by the local authority during a term, year or month, or whatever period of time it relates to, and for the school to decide how to spend it. It obviously has to do certain things—teach certain subjects and employ teachers — but basically the school can decide its priorities. First, that would break the monolithic nature of ILEA, which worries many of us. Secondly, we would get better value for money with a far greater degree of satisfaction on the part of head teachers, governors and staff in the schools which actually make the decisions.

The freeze on ILEA's spending in cash terms is acceptable and achievable without any of the horrendous results predicted by the Opposition. However, it would help if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would explain in detail how those savings can be made without irreparable damage to education. I ask him to consider in some detail the two specific points that I have mentioned: first, that it is no longer reasonable that ILEA should receive no rate support grant now that it has been rate-capped; and, secondly, the concept of delegating management of budget and finances to individual schools.

11.7 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I make it clear at the outset that alliance Members will vote against the order, first, because we are still opposed to the concept of rate capping. In our view, rate capping is wrong in principle. There is no point in having a directly elected Inner London education authority if we are taking from the electors of inner London the right to decide crucial issues affecting our authority. Its spending crucially should be decided by the electors, not by Ministers and civil servants in the Department of Education and Science. That is one objection to the principle of rate capping.

Secondly, we believe that rate capping is bureaucratic in operation and often wasteful in practice. If one has to apply damaging cuts at the last moment, the risk is that they are imposed not on the basis of any careful consideration of where the cuts can do least damage, but simply on the basis of where they can be made in a hurry. That can sometimes be crucial.

I believe, and I am sure my colleagues agree, that it is impossible to impose the sort of cuts which are talked about in the order without damaging the basic fabric of education. We have already heard the views of the education officer, Mr. Stubbs, but it is worth recalling one sentence of his letter dated 21 January 1986 to the Department of Education and Science:

"The consequence of expenditure reductions on such a scale could not avoid causing grave damage to the education service."

If Conservative Members are not impressed by that, perhaps I should quote from a letter from Professor David Smith, the leader of the Conservative group on the Inner London education authority who resigned recently and who gave some of the reasons for his resignation in a letter to the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). I quote from that letter:

"The recent decision by Central Government with respect to the precept limit for the Authority will result in cuts in the level of service; cuts that I believe will be disruptive to the education service".

That is the view of the former Conservative leader in ILEA, and it should carry some weight with Conservative Members.

Having said that ILEA has a powerful case, I am bound to say that it is undermined by the point which was made by the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). The shock horror stories about cuts would be much easier to accept this year if we had not heard absolutely the same stories last year. We heard them not only from ILEA, but from the Greater London council, and from inner London boroughs that were rate capped last year. We were told in banners across every public building that rate capping meant cuts. We were told that rate capping was the end of civilization as we knew it in inner London.

What has happened? That spending has gone on as if there were no problem. There have been no cuts and no redundancies. Therefore, it is hardly surprising if the Government, on the one hand, and the electors in inner London, on the other, take the view that it is just another set of stories like the ones that they were told last year. I believe that there is much more basis to the shock horror

stories this year, but the ILEA cannot be surprised if, having cried wolf last year, it finds that the electorate do not respond to cries of wolf on this occasion.

ILEA has not responded to the obvious threat of rate capping. There has been no attempt to plan for the inevitable. The leaders of ILEA do not live in an ivory tower. They knew what was going on, and that rate capping in the coming financial year would be more stringent and effective than in the previous year, yet they made no attempt to provide for that. In fact, spending has continued to rise, consuming nearly all the available reserves.

Spending has gone beyond budgeted expenditure. In the summer of 1985, for example, an extra £300,000 was provided for more publicity. A week or so ago, an extra £100,000 was provided for additional press officers. That is an extremely strange sense of priorities. Here is an education authority telling us, with reason in my view, that the basic fabric of inner London's education is being impaired by the order, yet it is providing extra money to pay for publicity and press officers. That is not a powerful case to put to inner London electors.

ILEA has a great deal of which to be proud, but there are areas of concern about its spending priorities and spending record. For example, since 1978-79, the cost of administration has increased by 16·5 per cent. in real terms at a time when the school rolls were going down by 12 per cent. That needs exploration. The cost of community education is up in real terms by 16 per cent. over that period when the number of student hours has fallen by 15 per cent.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The hon. Gentleman is making a strong attack on the existence of ILEA and its methods of spending money. Does he agree that it would be useful if every education authority was afforded the opportunity to use falling school rolls to improve the pupil-teacher ratio and provide the many education facilities that are wanted in schools but have been denied in the past?

Mr. Cartwright: The hon. Gentleman could not have been listening carefully. I said that administration costs, not teaching costs, were up 16·5 per cent. while school rolls had gone down by 12 per cent. There may be a case for improving the teacher-pupil ratio at a time of falling school rolls, but I do not accept that the case for improving and extending administration is anything like so powerful.

Another example is expenditure on education welfare services, which is up 5 per cent. in real terms while school rolls have fallen by 12 per cent., and there is no improvement in attendance figures.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a great deal of school welfare concerns the welfare of the individual child, not just attendance? Does he accept that unemployment and other problems in London have increased substantially in recent years, adding very much to the burden of education welfare officers?

Mr. Cartwright: I do not dispute for a moment that a case can be made out for those things. I am simply saying that, on the basis of the figures, those issues should be explored. Here is an authority saying that it is not possible to make any economies, except in the basic fabric of education. I am giving instances of areas that could be examined.

Inner Londoners are willing to invest in inner London education, but in some cases they are concerned about the way in which money is being spent. That concern was confirmed in a couple of MORI opinion polls carried out by the Inner London education authority and paid for at the expense of inner London ratepayers. We have seen an extremely expensive campaign publicising some of the polls' findings, but only some of them. Some have been suppressed and some show concerns of inner London electors about the way in which some aspects of ILEA policy is pursued.

The response of the ILEA leadership to the problem of rate capping is typical of Labour local authorities faced with rate capping elsewhere. They have taken a difficult problem and have been determined to make it as bad as possible. They have been intent on creating confrontation with the Government. They have pursued a policy denounced by the leader of the Labour party as playing politics with people's jobs and services. We reject that approach as vehemently as we reject the order.

11.15 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I speak as a parent. All three of my children go to Inner London education authority schools. I am the last person to be uncritical of some aspects of ILEA's performance and the performance of its schools, and I can criticise, because I experience what those schools are trying to do. However, I recognise the circumstances in which they are trying to do their job.

I represent many people who send their children to ILEA schools. Most of them are satisfied with what the authority is doing and trying to do. In our traditional British way, we shall put that to the test in May. I am certain that the new directly elected Inner London education authority will have an overwhelming majority of Labour Members when that election takes place.

It is preposterous that a Government who introduce a directly elected authority, having tried 15 other types of attack on ILEA in preceding years, should suddenly decide that that elected authority has no mandate to spend the money that the people who put themselves to the bother of being elected believe needs to be spent on education in inner London.

Where do the Government get any mandate to carry out what they propose to do to inner London's education? There has been no mention in any Tory election manifesto that they have ever put to the people of inner London of establishing that type of authority. There was no reference in any Tory manifesto put to anyone in the country that the Secretary of State would have powers to decide how much money could be spent on education in inner London.

Even in the 1983 general election—a disaster for the Labour party—we still returned a majority of Labour Members for inner London—and, by God, it shows. Only one Tory inner London Member is present in the Chamber. At least, he had the decency to speak. If the Inner London education authority proposes school closures, the rest, in their hypocritical way, will shuffle in with the delegations, saying, "Do not damage the education of my constituents." But they will have busily voted for the limitation order tonight.

In inner London, Labour have the majority of GLC-ILEA seats on the GLC, so there is no mandate for the Government there. Even in our bad times, Labour has controlled the inner London boroughs.

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

The Government have no mandate to limit the spending of ILEA. The authority is not even spending any of the Government's money. Under this skinflint, abominable Government, the authority, which has the most difficulties in this country, receives no grant.

The Secretary of State, who is a freeman of the City of London, may ask about the poor business ratepayers who have been beaten to their knees by awful Labour authorities, but even the London chamber of commerce —the people who pay the rates; that is about the only tax they do pay, which is why they are so opposed to the rates—say that the precipitate reduction is too great and ought not to take place.

The Tories in my constituency have chosen their candidates for the new authority. One is a woman called Olga Maitland, who, I believe, writes for a newspaper. She sends all three of her children to private schools, but is seeking to have the right to determine what happens to the schools of all the other people in my constituency. She will not touch those schools with a barge pole; that is typical of the hypocrisy of many Tory Members.

Mr. Maples: Surely one of the responsibilities of the elected members of the new education authority will be to look after the interests of the ratepayers.

Mr. Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Act under which ILEA was established he will not discern any statutory responsibility for ratepayers being imposed on members of the authority. The ILEA members should look after the education of children, young people and adults in inner London; that is their duty. The ratepayers will be able to vote them in or vote them out in the usual way. It is unreasonable for the Secretary of State to set spending limits for ILEA. The authority, for good or ill, whether its decisions are right or wrong or properly judged or not, and whether every penny of the money is needed or not, should be taking the decisions and carrying the can with the electorate.

We do not believe that the Secretary of State is fit to decide such matters. I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman is personally fit to make those decisions. Like most people interested in education, in inner London, I was exhilerated to see on a recent billboard of *The London Standard* "Joseph to Quit". It seems that even the right hon. Gentleman has decided that he will not be up to representing the electors of Leeds at the next election. The people of inner London think that he is unfit to unrepresent and damage the education of their children now, and that he ought to go. It will be a disgrace if anyone who purports to represent the people, parents or children of inner London votes for the order. It will undoubtedly damage the interests of those children. The Secretary of State said——

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Too long.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Mrs. Kellett-Bowman) says that my speech is too long. With due deference to my hon. Friends, I shall take as long as I need to talk about the interests of the people I represent.

The Secretary of State said that ILEA charges 35p per school meal. As a result of that, the proportion of schoolchildren in inner London eating school meals in this time of great impoverishment and great unemployment has increased. And so it should. That is good and worthwhile spending. There is no more direct way of getting nourishment into a child than by giving it a meal. That is a better way of spending money than anything that Tory Members can think of.

We have heard suggestions that ILEA is profligate. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West had the decency to accept that the Metropolitan police were possibly more exorbitant in their expenditure per unit than the ILEA. It is no good him shaking his head now. I understand that the Secretary of State for the Home Department is likely to agree to increase the expenditure of the Metropolitan police because of inner-city difficulties.

The Secretary of State has taken unto himself direct powers over inner London. When London Members ask to see the Home Secretary about London matters, he agrees to see us. We want to ensure that when representatives and parents from inner London ask to see this Secretary of State about inner London matters, in which he will now directly interfere, we are not told to raise them in a debate. If he takes the powers, he must take the responsibility. We believe that he should leave the responsibiltiy where it properly rests — with those elected to provide an education service in inner London. They should be given the resources to do that. If what they do is not right, they will face the direct consequence by being thrown out of office by those who can choose to elect or not elect them. That is the way that it should be, and that is how it will be under the next Labour Government.

11.27 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I agree with everything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). It is quite wrong that we should debate the expenditure of almost £1,000 million of public money in a one-and-a-half-hour debate late at night. It is the product of the centralisation of all decision-making around one or two Ministers. It is unsatisfactory that we should be expected to take decisions on matters affecting the children of inner London when few inner London Members are present—only one on the Government Benches—and when the Secretary of State is barely listening to the debate. I wonder whether he really understands the damage that he is about to do to the children of inner London.

For seven years before I became a Member of this House, I was a full-time trade union official for the National Union of Public Employees within ILEA. For the past two years I was secretary of the manual workers' negotiation committee for all manual workers employed by the ILEA. It would be wrong not to say that, on occasions, there were severe differences between us and ILEA on some of its employment policies, or that we did not make strong demands. However, both we and ILEA were acutely conscious that education is about service to the community and about all those who work in a school, be they cleaners, school meals assistants, teachers, secretaries or whatever.

I represent an ILEA constituency, and many of my constituents and others will suffer badly if the order is passed. It began from a long process of discussion within ILEA not about how to improve educational standards, which apparantly the Secretary of State wants, but from a process of fear about what might be cut in schools or what schools might be closed.

Rather than trying to face the problems of the children in inner London, teachers, administrators and others involved in education have instead had to suffer endless letters from the Secretary of State about how to make reductions in their educational expenditure.

Only a few days ago, with much publicity, the Government announced their inner-city initiative — a paltry few million pounds to be spread over a large area. Indeed, the amount being offered to various parts of the country is less than required to build 50 houses. Yet tonight, with no publicity, the Government propose to make enormous cuts in the education budget of inner London.

I have to ask the House to consider areas such as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras represents, the levels of unemployment there and the fate of many school leavers. In 1980, one year after the Government came to office, there were eight youngsters for each job available for school leavers. Three years later there were 20. That is the measure of how bad unemployment has got in inner-city areas.

ILEA cannot be expected to control the economy of inner London or to solve all of the problems that are heaped on it by the Government's economic policies, but it has at least tried to equip those youngsters for the type of life that they will lead when they leave school. It has tried to develop community education. It has developed a first-class further and higher education service and it tops the league table in any sense in the provision of further education for those who missed out on any opportunity when they left school. ILEA's principle has been to provide higher and further education for those who wish to follow it, irrespective of their ability to pay and irrespective of their academic achievements on leaving school.

Mr. Maples: And irrespective of the cost.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Member might shout nonsense, but, like my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, I am sure that he would be the first to lead a deputation if he heard that the City Lit was closing down.

Mr. Maples: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I did not say nonsense, but "Irrespective of the cost". That is one of the things that the hon. Gentleman was not thinking about.

Mr. Corbyn: I am thinking very much about the cost of those institutions. I am aware that they are expensive and that they are non-statutory, but I am also aware that they are extremely valuable. It is not possible to run an education system based on an accountant's calculator. It must be based on the effectiveness of equipping children for later life and of further and higher education services.

The cost that the Secretary of State believes is the correct figure for London's education next year takes no account of many factors, and he knows it. It takes no account, for example, of inflation, which he presumably thinks does not happen. It also takes no serious account of the cost of abolition of the greater London council and the cost therefore forced on ILEA. It also has many hidden features, such as the right hon. Gentleman's obsession with ILEA leaving county hall. Has the right hon. Gentleman examined any of these matters? Has he examined the real costs, and the effects on every school and every child throughout London of the proposed precept?

The Secretary of State said that he would give some answers later. Here is a question for him, to which I should like a clear answer. He said that ILEA has not raised the price of school meals from 35p, a price that was set some years ago. I wish that it had been set at 25p before the last election. Nevertheless, I am glad that the price has not increased from 35p, as it means that many children are able to get a decent meal, which they would otherwise not get. Half of the children in inner London are eligible for free school meals, which demonstrates, and is an indictment of, the level of poverty.

My question is simple. If the price of school meals is raised to the level found in some outer-London boroughs —60p and 70p—how many children will go without a school meal because their parents cannot afford it? Bearing in mind the system by which school meals workers are employed—it is based on the number of meals served and an allocation of hours to each kitchen — how many school meals workers would lose their jobs? What would be the cost to the public purse through unemployment benefit, social security payments and the misery associated with making those meals workers unemployed? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that many of them are part-time women workers for whom no other job is available?

In short, the right hon. Gentleman is telling the people of inner London and ILEA that they should starve the children, sack the cooks and sack the school meals assistants because of his obsession with the pricing mechanism of the school meals service. Or, does he want ILEA to privatise its school meals service and throw more people out of work, so that even fewer children get a free school meal? That seems to be the direction in which he is moving. Will he consider the effects of his suggestions?

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): It is like all our yesterdays.

Mr. Corbyn: I look back on the period before 1979, not as the greatest achievement that I would have wished for, but when children were at least sure of getting a school meal, teachers were sure of their jobs, and a great threat did not hang over our education service.

The Government and Tory Members do not care about inner London or the future of ILEA. But they have been forced by public action and pressure to have an elected education authority, which they did not want, just as earlier public action and pressure prevented them from abolishing ILEA altogether and handing it over to individual borough councils. In May they will face an election, which they will certainly lose, and the education authority will be Labour controlled and, will certainly, be ratecapped until the Government are finally driven from office.

The Government must face the fact that they have no supporters for their proposals for inner London, and that ILEA, for all its difficulties and size, is a popular institution. Many people find it essentially sympathetic to the children and problems of inner London. But the Government, instead of recognising the special difficulties of inner London, such as its poor housing, high level of unemployment, and the fact that one in six children at ILEA schools speak English as a second language, not the first, are not prepared to recognise the effects of their policies on inner London. By the systematic removal of Government expenditure on inner London, the Government have ended treating the poorest part with the

[Mr. Corbyn]

greatest problems, with the greatest disrespect and giving it no financial help in most years. That is an indictment of their treatment of inner London.

Tonight we shall vote against the precept. I hope that the debate will be heard elsewhere, and that in the Fulham by-election people will understand what the Government's attitude to education means. They do not care. ILEA has attempted to provide the best for the poorest children. That is one reason why the Tories will lose the by-election, the council elections and, above all, in London the general election, when it comes.

11.37 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I wish to add some brief, specific points to those raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright).

The Secretary of State did not deal with interventions during his speech, and I wish to point to the fundamental inconsistency in his argument. He argued that there is scope for enormous cuts, and that it is appropriate to cut the ILEA budget by 6 per cent. However, his Cabinet colleagues are falling over themselves pretending that they need to spend more on inner cities and to give urban grants. Only last week the Paymaster General was providing more sweeteners for inner cities and pretending to provide more money, albeit only little more, because he recognises the needs. It is impossible for the Government to argue that the ILEA has no more needs, to accept that the inner cities, especially inner London, have enormous needs, and to dispute the views of inspectors that ILEA does a good job and of their colleagues, not least the leader of the Conservative group on ILEA, that the Government are misguided in their approach to inner London education. Inner London is clearly a deprived area in social terms. There are problems that stem from lack of opportunity, employment and educational attainment. There are fundamental social problems accompanied by drugs and other evils. Only investment in the education service can substantially alter that deprivation for life.

I shall show by example how misguided it is to cut inner London expenditure. First, I ask the House to consider the non-statutory sector in the youth service. I declare an interest, because before I was elected to this place I was a member of the Southwark area youth committee, and I remain a member. If we are to try to deal with the inadequate employment opportunities of young people and the time that they can put to misuse which they can put to good use with guidance, we must develop, not restrict, the youth service. If we are to give young women the opportunities that young men have often enjoyed and create opportunities for career guidance and training for the development of social relations, we must spend money on the youth service, not contract it. If it is said that all that can be afforded is statutory provision, there will be no money available for expanding the youth service in inner London, with the result that increasing numbers of inner London's young people will have little to do and little prospect of employment when they leave school.

Secondly, I shall give an even more harrowing and, I hope, pointed example to the Secretary of State. The special schools in London are still grossly underfunded. Recently I visited one of the special schools in Southwark — Cherry Garden school. It does not have sufficient supply and permanent teachers. It does not have the ability to take its severely handicapped pupils from the ground floor to the first floor because it does not have the money to install a lift. The staff are trying desperately to allow those with handicaps and disabilities to develop their potential so that they can lead a full life. The best chance that the staff have of doing that is with children between the ages of two, when they start at the school, and 18. If they are held back, if the opportunities to correct the imbalance that heredity, illness, nature or circumstances have brought about are not taken by investment through public funding, we are doubly handicapping those who most need the benefits of our investment.

The reality is that education in inner London is still not meeting many of the needs that Britain requires it to meet. I accept that there can be savings, but there is no scope for massively cutting investment. The needs are enormous. I hope that the Secretary of State will realise that a time of enormous cuts generally, the additional burden of cutting back severely on the ILEA budget will lead to a recipe for inner London that offers a far less satisfactory future for our young people than we ask for them, that they deserve and that otherwise they would be able to obtain.

11.44 pm

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), I declare an interest. Both my children went to ILEA schools, my wife is currently an ILEA teacher, and I am the governor of a school in my constituency. Over the past 15 or so years I have been a governor of about five other ILEA schools. I can claim some first-hand knowledge and some direct experience of the issues that we are discussing.

I am horrified by the way in which the Government think that, on a purely arbitrary basis, they have the right to determine the nature of education and spending on education in inner London. They have made out no case for their approach, which is based upon no direct knowledge of what is going on in the schools. They merely take the view that they must punish the ILEA. The reluctance of the Government to have any faith in the people of London and their elected representatives is astonishing. Why cannot the Government say, "Let the people of London decide; let us leave it to Londoners to decide how much they are willing to spend on the education of London's children"?

The truth is that since the Government's election they have decided that the ILEA is to be got at. The Government have decided to attack and undermine by various means education in inner London. This is only the first of many chapters in the saga. Having listened to the Secretary of State and his predecessors, and to the Tory party as a whole, I have come to the conclusion that they have no interest in the education or the children of inner London.

The Secretary of State compared London with Birmingham and other inner cities. ILEA is unique because it represents only an inner city area and because it has no leafy suburbs or middle class areas, with the exception of Chelsea, south Westminster and parts of Kensington. Therefore, London has a larger proportion of children from disadvantaged homes than any other education authority. For that reason if for no other, London should be treated as an authority that needs more help and support than any other education authority.

The one thing that Britain has going for it other than coal and diminishing oil is the skill, education and training of its people. That is the only thing that will, in the next century, separate Britain from underdeveloped countries. If we do not continually invest in those assets, we shall be throwing away our future, and we shall be as nothing. That is why I look with horror on any Government who say that education can be cut because it does not matter. We reject that view utterly and entirely.

11.46 pm

Sir Keith Joseph: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the time available, I must do my best to answer all the questions that have been put, but I must correct one impression at once. The picture has been given that in the ILEA area unemployment has been higher and earnings lower than in any other inner city area. That is untrue. I hope that the House will remember that employment and average earnings in London are higher than they are in any other inner city area. That is so on an inner city to inner city basis.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: I cannot give way, as I have a large number of questions to answer.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), who drew attention to the degree to which ILEA last year spoilt its case by prophesying gloom and doom, and crying wolf. It must expect some scepticism about its forecast this year in the light of what transpired last year. My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) asked why ILEA does not receive grant. I remind them of the unique rateable value of ILEA. That is why it does not get grants.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) made a significant speech about school meals. It is possible for ILEA to raise school meal charges to a level somewhat nearer the national average—from 35p, the level at which it has been since 1980, to the national average of 60p. One of the economies canvassed by ILEA officials was an increase to 50p. Whereas there might be job losses in connection with a rise in school meal charges, it does not follow that an increase in school meal charges leads necessarily to a decline in the take-up of school meals. Many other authorities have so designed their school meals service as to increase the take-up of school meals even though the prices have risen.

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: I am not giving way, as I have to cover many points in a limited time.

Moreover, although the hon. Member for Islington, North lays much emphasis upon the loss of jobs in the schools meals service—a loss of jobs which I do not accept as being necessary—ILEA's policy, involving increased rates for ratepayers, including businesses, involves an equal number of job losses, which the Opposition completely fail to take into account.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: No.

It is well known that job losses result from increased rates. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, it is not."] Many businesses have been driven out of high rate authority areas, with the consequent loss of a great number of jobs.

The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) asked me a number of questions that I shall seek to answer. He referred to the HMI comment in its annual report that ILEA provides adequate cover against a number of criteria. Nobody doubts that. The HMI report does not say, however, that ILEA provides that adequate cover at an economic cost. Nor must the hon. Gentleman or the House confuse the provision of service with the quality or standards of that service. Above a certain minimum sufficiency for education it is not possible to measure the standard, quality or effectiveness of education by the mere counting of spending. Spending is extremely important, but it is not the same as quality or effectiveness. The point about ILEA is that, despite record spending, it does not succeed in raising the standard, effectiveness or quality of the education of its pupils above that of much lower spending authorities that face equal problems. The Government readily accept the difficulties that ILEA, to an even greater extent than other inner city authorities, faces in education, but the difference between spending and effectiveness has to be borne in mind.

The hon. Member for Durham, North asked the Government to remember that ILEA has proposed savings of £18 million. Yes, it has, but what does it intend to do with those savings? It does not intend to return them to the ratepayer. It intends to redeploy them upon other facets of education.

Much emphasis was laid upon the damage that ILEA's education officials assert will be caused if the draft order is approved, because only one in three vacancies in ILEA will be filled during the year in question. That damage will occur only if there is no vigorous management to carry out a redeployment of staff. As I said in my opening speech, ILEA retains 450 teachers who are supernumerary to its establishment. It could therefore replace one in three vacancies without any damage being done to the quality of education if it carried out at the same time a vigorous redeployment policy. Vigorous management will be necessary.

I was asked to give examples of other education authorities that have carried out cuts of 6 per cent. in one year. Manchester has carried out a cut of 9 per cent. I have a list of authorities that have made cuts in real terms of 5 per cent. or more. They have made those cuts from a spending base that is far lower than ILEA's. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] Barnet has done so twice; Harrow; Kingston upon Thames; Merton twice; Richmond upon Thames; Sefton; Manchester; Trafford twice; Doncaster; Gateshead; Newcastle upon Tyne; South Tyneside; East Sussex; Gloucestershire; Kent and Somerset.

Special schools in ILEA are not underfunded. They spend well above the national average with due attention to the handicap of each child.

The hon. Member for Durham, North asked whether the Government are seeking to impose an illegal budget on ILEA. Certainly not. I was asked by the hon. Gentleman whether the Government are seeking to require ILEA to ignore its statutory duties. Certainly not. ILEA has statutory duties and it would be open to a default inquiry if it failed to carry out its statutory duties.

[Sir Keith Joseph]

I am sure that the officers of ILEA, to whom praise has rightly been given by the hon. Gentlman, are able to carry through the necessary savings once the House approves an order on the lines of the draft order being put to the House this evening. I regard them as certainly able to carry out the savings required without damage to the education of the children of ILEA.

No Government have ever shown more concern for the quality, standards and effectiveness of education in Britain than this Government.

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: No.

ILEA cannot expect that the public should measure its standards, quality and effectiveness merely by its spending. It can maintain, and I hope improve, the quality of the education of the children of inner London by more vigorous management even at lower cost. I ask the House to approve the order.

Mr. Radice: Why did not the Secretary of State agree to a compromise with ILEA this afternoon, as he was perfectly able to do? If he had agreed to a compromise, ILEA would be accepting savings and there would have been a better precept. That would have been the sensible course for the Secretary of State to take. He has not taken it, and is is stupid not to have done so.

Sir Keith Joseph: Because I believe that ILEA can maintain and even improve the standards of education to its children at a lower cost to the ratepayers. Indeed, if the hon. Gentleman challenges me, I say that I have raised the expenditure level and the maximum precept by a significant amount.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 209, Noes 160.

Division No. 66] [11.57 pm

AYES

Ancram, Michael
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moscampbell, Norman
Moschell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Osborn, Sir John
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Peter Lloyd and
Mr. Francis Maude.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Hed'sh)*
Bermingham, Ger[illegible]
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Don Dixon.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Prescribed Maximum) (Inner London Education Authority) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

Orpington Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

12.8 am

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring to the attention of the House the problem of the future of Orpington hospital. There is considerable anxiety in my constituency about the development of the hospital, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to provide reassurance on a number of points. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being here.

The stages in the progress of Orpington hospital from its origin as a hutted encampment to its destiny as a full-blown district general hospital has been reported by me to the House in Adjournment debates from time to time and almost annually over the past five years. The history is one of erratic and slow progress marked by setbacks and changes of policy which have at times undermined the viability of the hospital as the intended district general hospital for the southern half of the Bromley health district.

The Government have proclaimed their attachment to the National Health Service, and one understands that the amount of public money being spent on the nation's health nowadays is in real terms greater than ever before. Unfortunately, that is not always the impression given locally when hospitals are closed or reduced in size or services on the ground of financial economies. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to show my constituents that the problems arising for Orpington hospital are not in any sense due to an overall reduction in funding.

The origin of Orpington hospital was a military hospital built with temporary materials by the Canadian Government during the first world war. When the Canadians left, the 30-acre site filled with single-storey wooden buildings and Nissen huts was taken over to serve local needs. Comparatively little was spent on the buildings themselves for many years, but the hospital, because of the quality of the staff and the support of the local people, attained a high reputation.

In the 1970s capital funds were allocated for the rebuilding of the hospital and the replacement of the huts by fine modern buildings. The most recent development is the construction of a modern surgery block—the Ontario wing—which cost over £8 million and is part of an overall strategy intended to provide a district general hospital on the site. The strategy of the Bromley district health authority is to have two district general hospitals, located at Bromley town in the north and Orpington in the south, to be completed by 1993-94 and to centralise all acute, general and surgical services on them with 600 and 470 clinical beds, respectively. That is a satisfactory arrangement for Orpington.

The site is well placed to serve the fastest growing part of the health district. At present it serves a population and patients spreading far south into Kent and the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Sir P. Mayhew). It is the nearest hospital in south-east London to the M25 motorway which, in the future, may be the source of casualties needing urgent treatment. The hospital stands on a healthy green field site of 30 or more acres, so there is plenty of room for expansion, unlike the site of Farnborough hospital nearby, which is in 19th century buildings and is very congested.

Faced by a need to make ends meet two years ago, the district health authority adopted a number of economies, one of which was the overnight closure of the accident and emergency services at Orpington hospital. An average of ten patients per night were turned away from the hospital — for an estimated saving of £70,000 per annum. Emergency cases locally, including those arising in Kent, out of office hours, must now be taken elsewhere, six miles further on, to Bromley or Sidcup. As a result, the hospital lost its status as a major accident centre. When the horrendous pile-up in fog on the M25 occurred two years ago, with many casualties, they had to be taken virtually past the hospital gates into Bromley. The overnight closure of the casualty service at Orpington was provisional. It has not yet been confirmed by the Minister, and I hope that it will not be.

A full-time accident and emergency service is a prerequisite for a full-blown district general hospital. The absence of such a service is bound to have a depressing effect on staff and on the recruitment of highly qualified people.

More recently, however, we have had an astonishing proposal from the district authority. In an attempt to get its sums right, it saw fit to recommend the downgrading of Orpington hospital in favour of the hospital at Farnborough, which it recommended should be designated as the site of the proposed district general hospital. The suggestion seems to have come originally from the professionals at Farnborough, who calculated that the total outlay of public funds could thereby be reduced. There was, however, a violent storm of protest in Orpington. Petitions were organised and public meetings held. One that I attended, in the biggest available hall, was so large that hundreds of people were turned away. The strength of local feeling in support of Orpington hospital was amply demonstrated. Fortunately, the district health authority gave way and, with some help, or perhaps pressure, from the regional authority, reinstituted Orpington as the site of the district general hospital.

After that, the planners went back to their calculators. They produced a new plan, accepting the emergence of Orpington ultimately as one of the two district general hospitals by 1993-94; but, pending the capital investment needed to implement the strategic aim of having two district general hospitals at Bromley and Orpington, they proposed to save revenue by running down Orpington's general medical services and transferring them to Farnborough.

That plan is inconsistent with the ultimate objective of district general hospital status for Orpington, and it has not found favour with the regional authority, which has promised more co-operation in solving Bromley's temporary financial problems. There are a number of steps that the regional authority could take to help Bromley district health authority, besides making capital development funds available. If, for example, it would be easier and less costly to run services when they are concentrated on the two sites, any repayments of loans and any impositions of the regional RAWP formula should be adjusted to the latter part of the period of redevelopment rather than spread equally over the whole period.

I conclude by asking my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary three questions. First, will he confirm

that Orpington hospital will be developed as a district general hospital once and for all? Secondly, will he tell us what will happen to Farnborough hospital? Thirdly, will he confirm that whatever changes are made elsewhere, Orpington's general medical and surgical services will not be run down meanwhile? If I can have his assurances on those points, I am sure that my constituents will rest content and endure stoically the minor changes and economies that may be forced upon the authority by the redevelopment. Changes and economies there always have to be, but please do not let us have any that will put the future of Orpington hospital into doubt once again.

12.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I hope that in responding to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) I shall be able to offer assurances to enable him and, more importantly, his constituents to rest content. I am glad to have the opportunity to spell out the future position of Orpington hospital as we understand it in the Department. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the constant attention that he pays to the health provision, as with all other provisions, of his constituents about whom he is intimately and passionately concerned.

My hon. Friend mentioned the national expenditure on the National Health Service, and quite rightly, because it is important. In all the concerns about the changing and improving pattern of the delivery of the NHS, it is forgotten all to often that, in real terms, increasing amounts of taxpayers' money is devoted to the Health Service. We are proud of the fact that, since we came to office in 1979, there has been an increase of more than 20 per cent. In 1986-87, spending will increase by £650 million and not by £670 million, which I quoted incorrectly in a debate on 5 February. The increase of £650 million represents an increase of 6·7 per cent., which is about 2·2 per cent. more than the forecast rate of inflation. Further increases are planned in the following two years and also further increases in capital spending. As my hon. Friend rightly said, in total, national spending on the Health Service is increasing in real terms. The question is how that affects our constituencies and its impact on our constituents.

My hon. Friend referred to the now famous RAWP —the resource allocation working party. The policy of redistributing resources between different parts of the country will continue. Those regions which have historically received less than their fair share of resources or which have rapidly increasing populations will receive the larger increases, ranging up to 8 per cent. The decisions on the 1986-87 allocation reaffirm our commitment. As regions move closer to their targets, it becomes increasingly important that the targets are themselves a reasonably accurate measure of need. We have therefore asked the NHS management board to review the operation of the formula, in particular the way in which relative needs in different parts of the country are measured, taking account of such factors as the patterns of illness across the country, and the special problems of the inner cities. I mention that, because it is important to understand that the RAWP allocation is carried out in a sensitive manner while trying to take the best possible account, within a steadily increasing global total, of the special demands and requirements of each district.

South-east Thames, in which my hon. Friend's constituency falls, is a RAWP loser—as the jargon calls it. It was 13 per cent. above target when RAWP was introduced in 1977-78 and in 1985-86 it is 5·6 per cent. above target. However, its position is better than originally assumed following the December statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. It will be receiving an increase of 5·8 per cent. compared with forecast inflation of 4·5 per cent.

One priority task that the region has set for the strategic period up to 1994 is the correction of the gross imbalance of funding within its districts. Sadly, that is not good news for Bromley, which is a RAWP loser. Its current revenue funding is 105·7 per cent. of its RAWP target and it is planned to reduce that to 100 per cent. by 1993-94. Therefore, there is no doubt that the district is facing financial problems, and a fundamental cause of that is the high number of acute beds in the district, scattered over as many as four sites. That inevitably leads to an inefficient use of resources and a needless drain on revenue that is in heavy demand in other parts of the NHS.

My hon. Friend has mentioned the scatter of beds in the health authority area. The Farnborough hospital is about two miles from Orpington and there is some duplication of services in general medicine and surgery. Not surprisingly, patient throughput, or the efficient use of beds is very low, with a death and discharge rate of 36·7. That is also the national figure on that NHS performance indicator. The corresponding figure for Bromley is 31·2. Nearby, Maidstone shows what can be achieved by the efficient use of services. It has a figure of 41·7.

The health authority was required to look for remedies, both short term and long term. Those remedies have come into conflict in Orpington and led to the turbulence that my hon. Friend described.

Detailed options are still being discussed, but there is agreement between the region and the district that Farnborough hospital should close within the strategic period, or not too long thereafter, and that beds should be concentrated at Bromley and Beckenham in the north of the district and at Orpington in the south. The overall number of acute beds in the district would reduce from the present 659 to 566, bringing about a considerable and lasting saving of resources, without any sacrifice of patient care. That is an important point.

As for the short-term future, several rationalisation measures have been proposed. There has been a history of abortive consultations and it would be complicated and perhaps pointless to go into details, but in December, those measures and others taken under the urgent temporary procedure in the spring of 1985, together with further measures still to be implemented, were presented as a package to the health authority. These measures, and others as yet unimplemented, have been the source of the latest contentions.

One proposal was the transfer of gynaecological and orthopaedic services from Beckenham which would have concentrated wholly on the care of geriatric patients. That was seen as workable and worthwhile, but trouble arose over the suggestion that gynaecology beds should be transferred to Farnborough hospital, where all acute beds in the south of the district would be concentrated, and that the number of acute beds in the district should fall drastically from 659 to 529.

Reaction from the region has been felt, although the proposals have not been officially presented to the region.

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

I understand that there was a meeting of the regional chairmen and the chairman of the district on 15 January when it was agreed that the proposals affecting Farnborough and Orpington hospitals and the massive reduction in acute beds were simply not acceptable. I understand also that the district has accepted that view.

The region has tried to be positive in suggesting other ways in which savings might be made, for example by rescheduling repayments of capital, deferring schemes jointly financed with the local authority, rationalisation at Cane hill hospital and other measures. The district can expect to come within about £500,000 of its expected 1986-87 shortfall — a sum which, with firm management, should be achievable without sacrifice of patient care.

The region's suggestions will be discussed fully at the district health authority meeting in February. Should it be necessary for the DHA to consult formally local interested parties or others on its proposal, and if the Community Health Council objects, the matter may have to come to Ministers for a decision. If that happens, I assure my hon. Friend that we will take into account all factors, including those that he has mentioned.

My hon. Friend kindly advised me of the three particular points that he wished to put to me. He asked whether the future of Orpington hospital was secure as the district general hospital serving the southern part of the district. My answer is a firm yes. There has been some recent speculation that acute services may be centred at Farnborough hospital, leaving Orpington to concentrate on the care of elderly and orthopaedic patients. That speculation resulted from proposals that had strong medical backing put to the DHA meeting in December. Those proposals will, however, categorically not be put into effect. At a meeting between the regional and district chairmen and their senior officers on 8 January, it was agreed that the proposals ran counter to the district's long-term strategy to close Farnborough hospital within the strategic period and focus district general hospital facilities at Orpington.

My hon. Friend asked about the future of Farnborough hospital. It is the district's long-term intention—10-plus years—to close Farnborough hospital, which is only two miles distant from Orpington. If that does not happen, Farnborough may be transferred into a smaller unit specialising in the care of elderly and elderly severely mentally infirm patients.

My hon. Friend's final question was whether I could confirm that acute services at Orpington will not be run down. Again, my answer is the affirmative. The district's long-term plan is to concentrate acute services at Bromley hospital in the north of the district and at Orpington in the south. Bringing acute beds together on two rather than the present four sites may mean a reduction in the district's current overall number of acute beds, but, with careful rationalisation, that will not entail any sacrifice in patient care.

I hope that I have said enough to reassure my hon. Friend about the future of Orpington hospital and the keenness with which the district, the region and the DHSS have followed the discussions on the provision of services, recognising the undoubted pressures that exist, but which apply, as my hon. Friend would be the first to say, to the NHS as a whole. Within the national resources that are increasing in real terms, I am convinced that the health care available to my hon. Friend's constituents will continue to improve in quality and, where appropriate, in quantity.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

LOTHIAN REGION (EDINBURGH WESTERN RELIEF ROAD) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Ordered,

That the Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee to which the Lothian Region (Edinburgh Western Relief Road) Order Confirmation Bill stands referred have leave to visit and inspect the site of the proposed road, provided that no evidence shall be taken in the course of such visit and that any party who has made an Appearance before the Committee be permitted to attend by his Counsel, Agent or other representative.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That leave be given to the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill to sit with two Members to-morrow and thereafter. — [The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow at Seven o'clock.

FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the quorum for conducting business in relation to the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill remain as at present.—*[Mr. Willie W. Hamilton.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Research and Development

1. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to promote civil spin-off from defence research and development.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): Civil spin-off from defence research is sought and encouraged through the British Technology Group, the patenting of inventions and direct contacts between the Department and industry. These arrangements are now complemented by the activities of Defence Technology Enterprises, a private sector company established as a joint initiative between the MOD and the private sector.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I welcome that reply. I know that my hon. Friend is aware of the concern in many quarters that so much of the nation's research and development is defence orientated. Will he tell the House a little more about the enterprise project, which, I believe, involves a partnership between public and private money?

Mr. Lee: Defence Technology Enterprises is a joint initiative. The share capital is owned entirely by the private sector. It is making encouraging progress. There are executives of Defence Technology Enterprises in three major research establishments — Malvern, Farnborough and Portsdown — seeking ideas and concepts for commercial exploitation. The first licence—for software programme verification—has already been agreed.

Mr. Douglas: What civil spin-off will result from the memorandum of understanding between the Government and the United States on the strategic defence initiative?

Mr. Lee: We expect that, in the fullness of time, there will be a substantial spin-off. It is impossible to be too specific at this stage.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my hon. Friend agree that a further spin-off will be substantial defence sales abroad? Will he confirm that those sales are currently about £2·5 billion, and will he say whether they are declining or expanding?

Mr. Lee: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. Defence sales are about £2·5 billion a year, or 3 to 4 per cent. of our total national exports. That excludes the Saudi aerospace contract, which is substantially more than that.

Westland EH101

2. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the future prospects for the Westland EH101 helicopter programme; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Norman Lamont): The EH101 has numerous advanced design features which will give it an unrivalled capability in the anti-submarine warfare role in the Royal Navy and the Italian navy. We expect it to sell well in both military and civil markets worldwide.

Mr. Atkinson: Is the Minister aware that his predecessor said that the EH101 helicopter programme would be an integral part of our future defence strategy? Is he further aware that Sir John Cuckney is reported to have said on two occasions that the Westland Helicopter Company would not join in partnership or merge with any company which refused to accept all that was involved in the EH101 programme? As Sikorsky has said that it does not support the EH101, will the Minister reaffirm that the British intention is to support Westland with Europe rather than with Sikorsky?

Mr. Lamont: I shall consider carefully what the hon. Gentleman has said. My understanding is that the EH101 is likely to go ahead, whatever the outcome of the present dispute about the future of Westland.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is it not a fact that the sale of the EH101 to the United States, particularly the civil version, would be greatly facilitated by the support of a United States partner in Westland? As United Technologies-Sikorsky does not have an aeroplane of that class, does it not seem to be an ideal product for it to promote?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend made that point in a recent debate. My hon. Friend, however skilful, will not tempt me to comment on the merits of the rival suitors for Westland.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Minister aware that the Secretary of State and his predecessors have frequently said that whichever partner is chosen for Westland, it cannot affect the EH101? Is he further aware that Sikorsky, far from withdrawing its support for the EH101, has said that if the opportunity should arise it will assist in selling the EH101 to the United States? Does he agree that that may be a second experience, building on the profitable experience from the sale of Harrier, of selling excellent British defence equipment to the United States, thus creating the two-way stream that we have all sought?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for correcting the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Atkinson). As I said in my reply, I do not believe that what he has said is correct.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will the Minister confirm that the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces have no desire, need or money for the Black Hawk helicopter made by Sikorsky?

Mr. Lamont: The position on the Black Hawk is as was stated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine).

Challenger Tank

3. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is likely to announce further orders for the Challenger tank; and if will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Possible further orders of Challenger are being considered as part of the annual recosting of the defence programme. It is too soon to say whether further orders will be placed.

Mr. Fatchett: Is the Minister aware of the widespread fear in Leeds that, because of the delay in placing further orders, jobs will be lost and the ability to continue to produce the next generation of tanks will be put in jeopardy? Is it not time that the Minister stopped delaying the decision, placed an order, and ensured job security for skilled and other people in Leeds?

Mr. Lamont: The function of the royal ordnance factory must be to supply what the country needs for its defence. The basis of policy cannot simply be to maintain employment. However, I am fully aware of the importance of the Challenger order to the Leeds factory.

Mr. Marlowe: Just as the tank replaced the horse as the main weapon available to the cavalry, is there not a chance that the helicopter may replace the tank?

Mr. Lamont: The needs of different systems and the best way to counter a tank threat from a potential enemy are constantly examined in the new integrated structure within the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. McNamara: Is it not a fact that the Ministry of Defence has said that it wants to increase orders for the Challenger tank, that the Army wants it, and that the mess that the Government have made of the defence budget alone is delaying the placing of the orders?

Mr. Lamont: The Government have already placed orders for six regiments of Challenger, and we intend that further orders should be placed in future. When those orders can be placed will depend on the resources available.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Why does the Minister hide behind the shield of market forces when buying necessary equipment? Does he not understand that timing is crucial for workers in Leeds? Why does he procrastinate over placing an order when it is crucial to the security of jobs in Leeds? Why does he not place the order and get on with it?

Mr. Lamont: I understand the importance for Leeds, but the Government's function is not to maintain capacity merely for the sake of it.

Defence Review

4. **Mr. Gordon Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to conduct a defence review.

9. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans for a defence review.

13. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for a defence review.

16. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to hold a defence review; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): I explained in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) on 30 January that while, in the usual way, decisions on priorities will have to be taken in the coming months in order to match the forward programme to the available cash, I see no need for any fundamental change in our defence commitments or in the main roles undertaken by our armed forces.

Mr. Gordon Brown: If the Secretary of State will not consider a full-scale defence review, will he at least review the risks and hazards to our defence forces' readiness if our helicopters are to be provided courtesy of Sikorsky-Fiat, our military vehicles are to be made available courtesy of

General Motors of Detroit and our naval frigates and submarines, and even our nuclear deterrents, are to be refitted by Foster Wheeler or some other international conglomerate? Will the right hon. Gentleman study the letter from his hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, who expressed his complete opposition to the privatisation of the royal dockyards and warned of the fear that they might fall into the hands of strangers?

Mr. Younger: We always take the greatest trouble to ensure that in any changes this country's security of supply is maintained. It might be of interest to the hon. Gentleman if I remind him that since the 1930s the vast majority of military trucks used in this country have been bought from a company owned by Americans. That does not appear to have done us much harm.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: What assurances can the Secretary of State give to the Royal Navy and the warship building communities that they will not be the major victims of any expenditure cuts in his Department? When will he place the three type 22 warship orders that are scheduled for this year, and when will he order the fleet auxiliaries?

Mr. Younger: I have nothing to add to what my hon. Friends the Minister of State for Defence Procurement and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement have said about the orders in the debates which have taken place in the past two weeks. On security, I should have thought that all the hon. Member's constituents and those of his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) would be looking with some dread at the possibility of the Labour party ever coming back into office, because if that happens there will be huge job losses in those constituencies.

Mr. Hardy: With chickens rapidly coming home to roost and Treasury forecasts of defence spending proving rapidly to be awry, would it not be as well for the Secretary of State to recognise the problem and to act or announce decisions upon it now rather than wait for further time to elapse and for his predecessor's role to be forgotten?

Mr. Younger: With regard to recognising facts, the hon. Gentleman must recognise that after six and a half years of this Government the defence budget is approximately 20 per cent., in real terms, above what it was in 1979. We should put that against statements by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who has made it clear in debates that the Labour party has no intention of increasing the present levels of conventional spending. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has a leg to stand on.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Secretary of State accept that the so-called salami-slicing of defence spending, which is implicit in his answer, will continue to lower the morale of our forces? In recent months that has led to increasing numbers of resignations. Will he make a virtue out of necessity and announce the abandonment of the Trident project, which means not just high opportunity costs in terms of new conventional equipment, but a considerable escalation in our nuclear fire power at a time when there is serious negotiation over deep cuts?

Mr. Younger: I do not accept most of the hon. Gentleman's premises. To abandon our Trident programme would be to make a grave change in this country's future security. I think, but I am not sure, that his SDP allies propose not just to abandon Trident but to replace it with something else. I do not know where they would find the money for that.

Mr. John Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept that deterrence is the product of capability times will, and that cuts in defence give the impression to other nations that we lack the will to defend ourselves? Will he assure the House that future defence reviews will not contain cuts in effective spending and effective capability?

Mr. Younger: I understand my hon. Friend's point on future cuts. We have clearly laid out the provisions for defence for the next three years. I repeat that that starts from a position at least 20 per cent. higher than it was six years ago, thanks to the action of this Government.

Dr. Hampson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that what he has just said means that there is a firm commitment to Trident? Will he comment on the recent press speculation on a review of or a delay in the Trident programme?

Mr. Younger: There is certainly a firm commitment to Trident. The programme is on course. There is no change in the Government's position.

Sir Anthony Grant: In his review, will my right hon. Friend seek views on cruise missile deployment, especially that of the Liberal party and the SDP, because it seems to be obscure at the moment?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate what my hon. Friend says. However I should make it clear that I am not conducting a review on the main components of our defence stature. I am considering ways in which the available cash can be worked into it. I believe that consulting the SDP and the Liberal party about their plans would be time-consuming and not a profitable exercise.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: When my right hon. Friend reviews our defence requirements, will he bear in mind the importance of maintaining an adequate surface fleet, and will he consider the merits of the short, fat frigate design?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point about the surface fleet, which we shall be taking into account. The design of future frigates is another matter.

Mr. Dalyell: In the work carried out by the right hon. Gentleman in preparation for the review, are any of the papers of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) or of Sir John Nott denied to him?

Mr. Younger: I am not aware of any papers being denied to me. I must again make it clear that I am not conducting a defence review in the terms that the Opposition consider it to be. I am examining the present resources. Some difficult decisions will have to be taken, but there will be no need for any change in our main defence posture.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that we welcome his intention not to have a fundamental review on defence? The Opposition would welcome it, because they want to destroy a British independent deterrent.

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. The Opposition have done that twice in recent memory, and it has not done our defence any good.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's decision not to have a fundamental review,

but like a good Scotsman he is having a cash review. When that cash review is complete, the defence budget will be seen to be out of control by £1 billion. Is it not impossible to finance Trident and all the existing conventional commitments at the same time? Something must give—Trident or conventional defence.

Mr. Younger: What is taking place is the normal annual process of a review of the long-term costings of the defence programme. Regarding matching the two factors, one cannot undertake to buy everything that everyone wants in each department. There is no call for any fundamental review of our defence posture.

Mr. Soames: Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that it is folly to pretend that there is no crisis in defence spending in Britain today? Does he agree that it is far better to have a defence review now to tackle the fundamental choices that must be made rather than wait until the crisis becomes untenable?

Mr. Younger: I know my hon. Friend's long-held strong views on this subject. I assure him that in my examination of the defence budget I shall not leave anything to chance. I shall take the greatest care.

Defence Procurement

5. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet representatives of British defence manufacturers to discuss defence procurement.

Mr. Younger: I intend to chair the next meeting of the National Defence Industries Council on 27 February.

Mr. Hamilton: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the future of the Nimrod project is very much in question because of its escalating cost? That project is manufactured primarily by GEC. When the chairman of GEC, the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior), makes representations to the right hon. Gentleman, does he speak on behalf of his constituents in Waveney, or is he earning his £60,000 a year as chairman of GEC?

Mr. Younger: Another question has been put down on this subject, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) speaks to me as chairman of GEC, he is, of course, speaking for that company.

Sir John Farr: Can my right hon. Friend say whether the 50 or 60 per cent. of the content of Trident that is supposed to be British is being prepared and whether approaches are being made to British manufacturers to fulfil that proper percentage?

Mr. Younger: We are anxious to secure the highest percentage of British participation in this project, and we shall follow my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Duffy: At that meeting on 27 February, will the Secretary of State ensure that British defence manufacturers are fully alive not only to the contract and job possibilities open to them through the Nunn and Quayle amendments and the Weinburger memorandum, but to the longer-term threat posed by Gramm-Rudmen?

Mr. Younger: I have no doubt that that subject will be discussed at the meeting.

Mr. Robert Atkins: In connection with the procurement of the 155mm shell for the FH70, does my right hon. Friend agree that had that procurement been from a British company the delay of 15 months that has surrounded this contract would have necessitated possible cancellation and second sourcing from another company? Why should it be any different when we are procuring the balance of the contract from Rheinmetall in Dusseldorf, which is harming many ordnance factories, including the one in my constituency?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate my hon. Friend's strong feelings on the matter, which affects his constituents, but, as he knows, these purchases are part of a work-sharing agreement which is of mutual benefit to West Germany and Britain. It would be impossible to upset the agreement without causing great difficulties.

HMS Fearless and Intrepid

8. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the order of replacements for HMS Fearless and Intrepid.

Mr. Lee: In anticipation of the current specialist amphibious ships coming to the end of their useful lives in about the mid-1990s, we have, during the past year, been examining all the aspects of our future amphibious capability in relation to our overall defence needs. We expect to make a decision on our future amphibious capability later this year.

Mr. Dixon: As it has been reported that the joint chiefs of staff have recommended the complete replacement of these two vessels, why does the Minister not accept their advice and place these orders as early as possible, preferably on the River Tyne, where the shipyard workers are looking for work from this Government, bearing in mind the uncertainty about the type 23 and the royal fleet auxiliaries?

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to my reply in terms of timing. The obtaining of any future orders will be a matter of competition. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are evaluating tenders from Swan Hunter in his constituency and from Harland and Wolff.

Mr. Allen McKay: How much of the surface fleet will the Government let go to keep Trident? How much of the manufacture and maintenance of Trident will be carried out by British manufacturers?

Mr. Lee: We have every intention of maintaining a fleet of about 50 escort vessels.

Mr. O'Neill: Given that the Government will have only a cash review and that it is not to be a fundamental review, how can the Minister give any assurances about the size of the fleet or, indeed, about the amphibious craft about which my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) asked him?

Mr. Lee: The hon. Gentleman and the House need only examine our naval expenditure since 1979 to know that we have a record of which to be proud. We shall not let the conventional Navy down.

NATO Exercises

10. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if troops from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation exercising in the United Kingdom are required to notify his Department of the equipment and weapons to be involved; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): We expect all non-UK NATO service personnel exercising in the United Kingdom to do so after consulting, and with the concurrence of, the relevant Ministry of Defence authorities, which would be notified in advance of the nature of any weapons and military equipment to be used.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister confirm that last July his Department said that British troops were exercising with American troops in West Germany with atomic demolition munitions? Can he give the House an assurance that if permission were asked for these weapons, or even dummy substitutes, to be used on exercises in the United Kingdom his Department would refuse to give authority for their use?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman will know that we do not comment on the presence or otherwise of nuclear weapons. As to the nuclear assets that the British forces have, the hon. Gentleman will see the references to those in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Mr. Stokes: Is my hon. Friend aware that far from carping at the presence of our allies in this country, most people gladly welcome them?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. I suggest that the commitment by the official Opposition to send the Americans packing from this country is the single most disastrous commitment made by any political party since the war.

Nimrod Early Warning System

11. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of the Nimrod AEW Mk. 3.

12. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the latest position on the Nimrod air early warning system.

Mr. Younger: By the end of Novermber 1985 some £646 million at outturn prices had been spent or committed on the Nimrod AEW Mk. 3 project; this equates to £882 million at 1985-86 average prices. We are currently in negotiation with GEC Avionics Ltd. and hope shortly to be in a position to announce our decision on the best way forward.

Dr. Marek: Does the Secretary of State agree that the technology should continue to be available in this country at GEC? Does he further further agree that the jobs associated with that technology should continue to exist in that or a closely-related sector? Does he agree that the public should get value for money from this policy? If he agrees with those three principles, what is he going to do about the mess he is now in?

Mr. Younger: I agree about the desirability of having British technology kept to the fore. That is important, as are the jobs involved. However, my other job is to ensure that the country gets good value on defence spending, and it is in that context that I have had these negotiations.

Mr. Ross: Has not a great deal of money already been spent on this project, which was not the design that the RAF wanted in the first place? What is the estimated cost of finishing the project to RAF standards and satisfaction, and what is the time scale involved?

Mr. Younger: Both those matters are part of the negotiations that I am having with GEC Avionics. We are trying to establish the answer to both those questions—how much it will cost to complete the project, and the likely time scale. The hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot comment further on that while the negotiations are in train.

Mr. Favell: How much more will the project cost? Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we must learn from the lessons of the past, it would now be false economy to abandon the Nimrod project, in view of the fact that all 11 aeroplanes are, to all intents and purposes, ready, thanks to British Aerospace, Woodford, and that it would cost at least between £600 million and £800 million to purchase an American alternative, which would take at least three years to deliver?

Mr. Younger: That is a good summary of a difficult situation. As always, my objective will be to do my best to see that the RAF gets a product that will do what it wants it to do, on time and at reasonable cost.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that when the decision was taken 10 years ago to keep the technology and the work force of a British firm together, it was a good decision? This aircraft was then urgently required. It is now 10 years on and we are still waiting for this urgent requirement. When will we finally resolve this matter?

Mr. Younger: It is of great importance to the defence of the country, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman's remark about urgency. He will I am sure agree that it is important from all points of view, not least that of the RAF, that we get the equipment to do the job that we have asked it to do.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is it not a fact that the Mark 3 Nimrod saga is the worst procurement scandal since world war 2? Will my right hon. Friend have the courage to grasp the nettle and not put more good money after bad, but rather procure the E3A Sentry, which works, and which will bring commonality with the rest of air defences in western Europe?

Mr. Younger: I very much appreciate what my hon. Friend says and note it carefully, but he will understand that I would not want to comment on it while negotiations are in train.

Mr. McNamara: If Nimrod were cancelled, would that be a fundamental or just a cash review? Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that on Thursday it will be proposed in Cabinet that the Government purchase or lease six AWACS, while a conclusion about the future of the Nimrods is made? Would it be possible to put the GEC system into a different British aeroplane?

Mr. Younger: Those are mostly points that are part of the negotiations. No decision of any kind has been taken to cancel the Nimrod project at this stage, and I cannot comment on anything that might or might not come up before my right hon. Friends and me in Cabinet meetings. It is far from clear that GEC equipment could just be put into another aircraft. The whole thing holds together as one system.

Trident

14. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has made any up-to-date assessment of the implications of the Trident programme for conventional defence spending.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence expects to be able to announce a revised costing for the Trident programme fairly soon. The Government's firm view is that, through the procurement of Trident, the United Kingdom can make an immeasurably greater contribution to deterrence and to the preservation of peace than by having conventional forces alone.

Mr. Hughes: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he is prepared to sacrifice conventional defence so that the Trident programme can go ahead unimpeded?

Mr. Stanley: There is no question of sacrificing conventional defence. My right hon. Friend has already made it clear that we have built up conventional defence expenditure to a vastly higher level than it was when we came to office in 1979. We must consider the totality of deterrence. Our firm view, which was shared by the Labour Government, which the hon. Gentleman presumably supported, is that a combination of nuclear and conventional deterrence is much better for the security interests of Britain and NATO than resting on conventional weapons only.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that conventional defence would be no defence without a nuclear deterrent? Does he further agree that the Trident programme will enable the twin arms of defence to go ahead together?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is not possible to provide protection against nuclear blackmail through conventional weapons. He is also right in saying that nuclear and conventional defence represent the best combination for Britain. It has been accepted by successive Governments.

Mr. Boyes: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that our forces are ill-equipped to carry out their major task, which is to defend Britain? Would not the cancellation of Trident, a proposal which is supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people, release cash to create jobs in British industry and to build the essential non-nuclear defence equipment that we need?

Mr. Stanley: Our forces are substantially better equipped than they were when the Labour party was in office. I am glad to say that the British people have voted in election after election for the preservation of Britain's independent strategic nuclear deterrent.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reasons for our acquiring this new weapon are precisely the same as those which led the Labour party to update Polaris with Chevaline, without even informing the House of Commons of the decision?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. and learned Friend is entirely right. Many people will wonder why the Labour party wants to run away from the modernisation of Britain's independent deterrent in opposition when it did the same covertly when in office.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is the Minister aware that the Secretary of State has made an important statement? The right hon. Gentleman said that there will not be a fundamental review but a cash review and that Trident is fundamental and sacrosanct. Does that mean that the cash review will fall entirely on Britain's conventional forces?

Mr. Stanley: We shall continue with the Trident programme.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: If the Government were so foolish as to cancel Trident, how many tank divisions would the money buy?

Mr. Stanley: I shall not give my hon. Friend an answer off the top of my head, but I can tell him that any number of tank divisions would provide no protection against the nuclear blackmail posed by the massive weight of the Soviet Union's nuclear armoury.

Naval Contracts (Scotland)

15. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to award naval contracts to shipyards in Scotland.

Mr. Lee: There are currently four frigates and two salvage vessels being constructed in Scottish yards employing directly over 5,000 people. In addition, we are planning to place an order for a range mooring vessel with Scott Lithgow later this year, followed by two lighters, subject to the negotiation of satisfactory terms and conditions.

Mr. Bruce: Is the Minister aware that his answer will be greeted with some disappointment in Scotland where a number of yards are in desperate need of naval orders? Is he further aware of the resentment at Hall Russell in Aberdeen that it was not able to bid for the last order which he mentioned? Will he now recognise that, because it is a designated warship yard, it is in urgent need of a Government order to enable its future to be secured? Cannot he come forward with something more positive than the reply he has just given?

Mr. Lee: I am sympathetic to the situation in Hall Russell, but I have to say that sadly there is overcapacity in all our warship yards, and future orders have to be won on the basis of competition.

Mr. Strang: Is it not a scandal that the Government are prepared to spend thousands of millions of pounds on American technology and American jobs, but are not prepared to invest in British jobs and British yards? Why do the Government not do something, for example, about the decline in the British merchant fleet?

Mr. Lee: The fact is that 95 per cent. of the £8·5 billion procurement spend is spent within the United Kingdom and sustains our defence budget — *[Interruption.]* — sustains in this country about 1·2 million jobs.

Defence Procurement

17. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence procurement contracts were post-costed in 1969 and in each subsequent year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Post-costing of defence procurement contracts began in 1973. The number of contracts which have been post-costed each year has

varied between 39 and 107, and the average is 80. I am arranging for the full figures to be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Ashton: When it comes to social security this Government watch every penny and every candle end, and hire an army of inspectors to do it. When it comes to national security they appear to take a very relaxed attitude and allow padding to go on. They seem to think that everything is way above board provided that it is defence expenditure.

Mr. Lamont; The post-costing arrangements cover 50 per cent. of the contracts of the Ministry of Defence by value. I am making arrangements for the post-costing arrangements to be increased further so that they cover a much larger proportion by number as well as by value.

Following are the figures:

Year	*Number of Contracts post-costed*
1973	63
1974	39
1975	64
1976	76
1977	96
1978	86
1979	106
1980	84
1981	95
1982	77
1983	107
1984	70

Dowty Rotol

18. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts are currently placed with Dowty Rotol.

Mr. Lamont: It is not the practice to reveal details of contracts placed with individual contractors, as this information is commercial in confidence. However, the overall level of direct business with Dowty Rotol, as indicated by payments made in the last complete financial year, is of the order of £11 million per annum. The number of contracts with the company is 252.

Mr. Madden: Can the Minister say whether any information concerning contracts with this firm has been passed to the Director of Public Prosecutions? If so, what decision has the DPP reached, and what action will be taken against this company for fleecing the Ministry of Defence and British taxpayers?

Mr. Lamont: As a result of investigation into Dowty Rotol's management of the CRSP store contract following a Ministry of Defence police investigation, the matter is being considered by the DPP and is, therefore, sub judice.

Trident

19. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the effect of recent exchange rate flutuations on the estimated cost of Trident for the current financial year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The estimate of the cost of Trident is £9·285 million at average 1984-85 prices and at an exchange rate of £1 to $1·38. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has just said, a revised costing for Trident will be announced shortly.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister recognise that the majority of people in the country believe that Trident creates a greater threat of our being attacked by nuclear weapons, and that the unpredictability of the exchange rate is a threat to the Government being able to provide adequate conventional defence forces for the country?

Mr. Lamont: The vast majority of the people believe overwhelmingly that Britain ought to retain its own national independent deterrent. That has been shown in election after election. The hon. Gentleman cannot talk, since the Labour party has indicated that it would not increase spending on conventional forces.

Mr. Marlow: In the hopefully unlikely event of the Warsaw pact unleashing its military machine westwards towards the Channel, would we be able to stop it by conventional forces alone?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. No amount of spending on conventional weapons could possibly purchase an equivalent amount of deterrence.

Fire Losses

22. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what losses in buildings and stores by fire damage have been experienced in the past five years.

Mr. Lee: Fire damage to Ministry of Defence buildings and stores has resulted in losses of £166 million over the past five years. By far the largest proportion of these losses, estimated by the board of inquiry at £152 million, is attributable to the fire at the Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington, on 24 June 1983.

Mr. Wilson: Can the Minister say to what extent the losses are covered by insurance?

Mr. Lee: My understanding is that it is not normal practice for the Ministry of Defence to insure.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Amess** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall be addressing the National Farmers Union.

Mr. Amess: When planning her engagements, will my right hon. Friend take time to visit some inner city areas to see the problems for herself and how the Government are trying to tackle them? When she does that, will she make a point of not hobnobbing with those council leaders who back violence and rioters against the police?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that this morning I spent some time looking at the records of the excellent work done in inner cities under the urban programme and under the derelict land grants, and very good it is. I take seriously the point my hon. Friend makes that council leaders who undermine the role of the police do great harm to the prospects of our inner cities.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: In view of those brilliantly co-ordinated, hat-in-ring weekend speeches at Blackpool, does the Prime Minister not intend to lead her Government at the next general election?

The Prime Minister: May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that I have seen off two Labour Governments and hope to see off a third.

Q2. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Howarth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency, where unemployment fell by 8 per cent. between September 1984 and the end of last year, a good number of companies are reporting better export prospects, vastly improved working practices and increased profitability? Does she agree that that is in large measure due to the improved business climate encouraged by the Government under her firm leadership?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving so cogently some of the most excellent news. There are areas where unemployment has fallen and jobs are being created. Indeed, our rate of job creation is the highest in Europe but not yet fast enough to bring about the reduction in unemployment everywhere that we wish to see. The work of manufacturing industry at the moment is rising and is excellent.

Mr. Kinnock: As the number of people who have been unemployed for more than a year is now larger than the total who were unemployed in 1979, is it not clear that a Prime Minister, who thinks that she is too old to stay and too old to go, should relieve the whole country and get out?

The Prime Minister: May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that I have not only seen off two Labour Governments; but I have seen off three Labour leaders and I hope to see off a fourth.

Mr. Kinnock: That does not convince anybody on the Labour Benches, and it convinces very few Conservatives. It convinces even fewer outside the House. Is it not the case that, given much longer, the Prime Minister will see off the country?

The Prime Minister: I hope that we shall have a third Conservative Government, which would be greatly to the country's advantage. The greatest disadvantage to the country would be if the Labour party won. That will not happen.

Q3. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sackville: Has my right hon. Friend taken note of the fact that our aerospace industries exported £4 billion of production last year, representing a 22 per cent. growth over the previous year? In the light of that magnificent achievement by the entire work force of aerospace industries, will she repudiate the constant carping and attempts to denigrate our manufacturing future by the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: Yes, gladly. I congratulate British Aerospace on its excellent export record. I also congratulate many other manufacturing industries, because last year exports by manufacturing industries reached an all-time high, which is a matter for congratulation to both management and work force alike.

Dr. Owen: Is the Prime Minister aware that there is a widespread feeling that petrol prices at the pumps are not coming down anywhere near fast enough? To ensure that they do come down, will she scotch any rumours that the Government intend to increase the price of petrol?

The Prime Minister: I have had a similar question twice recently, and I have pointed out that I hope that petrol prices will come down further and faster. The right hon. Gentleman is trying a fast one about the Budget, but he will not succeed.

Q4. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my right hon. Friend aware that although the United Kingdom continues to be the most generous in student support, recent changes in supplementary and housing benefit, allied to an increase in grant of 2 per cent., may cause some hardship to some students? Therefore, does she agree that we should again be looking at a mix of student loans and grants?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that in the United Kingdom student grants are still the best the world over. I note what he says about student loans. I think that perhaps a number of students may take up loans privately, which, of course, they are free to do. I would also point out that the proportion of 18-year-olds going into higher education is the highest ever. That is good news.

Mr. Dormand: Will the Prime Minister give urgent attention to the serious inconsistency which has arisen in connection with the modified colliery review procedure? Is she aware that the assessor in the case of Bates' colliery in Northumberland has upheld the appeal saying that he must take into consideration the social and economic effects upon the community, whereas at Hordern colliery in my constituency the assessor has said that he cannot take such considerations into account? Can that contradiction continue, and if not, what does the right hon. Lady propose to do about it?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter for the National Coal Board, but I will gladly pass on the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Q7. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm her commitment to nursery education and to the present statutory school starting age? Does she agree that any increase to six or beyond would be detrimental to the education of children?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. I gladly reinforce the Government's commitment to more nursery education. The level of provision for nursery children is at its best ever and I gladly confirm that there are no plans whatsoever to raise the school starting age to six years.

Q8. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Prime Minister explain to the House and the country why Land Rover was not offered to the general public in the same way as Jaguar, so as to maintain jobs and employment in Britain?

The Prime Minister: We would like to have the privatisation of the whole of British Leyland. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there are negotiations with General Motors for trucks and Land Rover-Leyland, and I think it best that those should be pursued. Should there be any other offers, they will be considered.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: Is my right hon. Friend aware that survival statistics produced by the Government show that women last longer than men?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that deduction. I shall do my best to ensure that it continues to be correct.

Q9. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Prime Minister aware that more than 7,000 people were killed or seriously injured in industry, including the construction industry, last year, and that the Government's proposals to relax health and safety legislation will cause even more deaths and more serious disabilities? Will the Prime Minister put workers first for a change, and change her mind about the proposed legislation?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that any relaxations in health and safety provisions are occurring that could possibly have that effect, or anything like it. If that were so, we would look at the proposal again.

Q10. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marlow: As there is quite a lot of pressure now to improve the prospects in the private rented sector of housing to make new housing stock available to the general public, and as the Housing Bill is in Committee, would it not be a good idea if some amendments were put forward and the Government agreed to them?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the importance of my hon. Friend's supplementary question and his desire to increase the stock of houses in the private rented sector. That is something to which we must give our attention. Whether this comes within the long title of the Housing Bill is not for me to say.

Gainsborough

Q12. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Gainsborough.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Mr. Leigh: I am sorry that my right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Gainsborough. Is she aware that Gainsborough depends heavily on the agricultural community and that that community needs reassurance, following the debate initiated by the Liberal party last week, in which the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) told me that he did not know what his party's quota policy was, in which the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) said "We have no quota policy", in which the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) said, "We are against quotas", and in which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said, "We are in favour of quotas"? It is asked, "If one alliance, why two parties?" Should we not ask, "If one alliance, why four quota policies?"

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the excellence of his supplementary question. I do not have time to visit Gainsborough, but there may be some farmers from the Gainsborough area in the audience that I shall be addressing this evening, and I shall have something to say about quotas.

Engagements

Q13. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clarke: Was the letter that was sent by the Leader of the House to the chairman of the North Shropshire Conservative Association approved by the Cabinet Committee? Should it not really have been sent to the chairman of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has read the letter. It was a most formidable speech about the excellence of Conservative policies and the necessity for continuity.

Q14. **Mr. Budgen** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Budgen: When my right hon. Friend speaks tonight to the National Farmers Union, will she emphasise to it that, once again, European Community expenditure, particularly on the common agricultural policy, is out of control and that the only way in which control can be achieved is by reducing agricultural prices in the EEC?

The Prime Minister: I shall be addressing very realistically the need to get down these surpluses and the need for both farmers and the Government to work together to do so. However, it must not be done by discriminating against Britain merely because our family farms are larger than those elsewhere in Europe.

Q15. **Mr. Terry Fields** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fields: Given the Prime Minister's confidence in her economic policies and her platitudes about unemployment, may I ask how she answers the people of Liverpool, where there is escalating unemployment and a twofold attack by the Government on a Liverpool city council that is prepared to provide jobs for people in the Liverpool area?

The Prime Minister: If there are any complaints about the Liverpool city council, they should be made to the council. In fact, I would support many of the complaints that have been made. I have confidence in this Government's economic policy. It is the right policy for Britain, for the creation of wealth and for the creation of jobs.

Severe Weather Payment

3.31 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Stnading Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the need for the exceptionally severe weather payment to be paid during the present very cold weather, and for other assistance to be provided by the Government for those on small limited incomes, especially the elderly, to help to pay fuel bills for heating purposes during this period."

My application deals with the need to ensure that the exceptionally severe weather payment is now paid, in view of the very cold weather, and that other assistance with fuel bills is given.

The importance of the matter is self explanatory. Hundreds of thousands of pensioners on the smallest incomes are suffering immense misery because they do not have the financial means to keep their accommodation any where near adequately heated.

The debate for which I am calling is needed because of the bureaucratic nightmare of trying to trigger off this exceptionally severe weather payment. The Government claim that, under the new regulations, district or branch managers of local offices are in effect responsible for making the decision. The managers understandably put the responsibility upon the regional officers of the Department of Health and Social Security. The regional offices in turn do not seem to have the knowledge with which to reach a decision on whether the weather is sufficiently cold for the special payment to be made. Therefore, the help that could be given to people who are on supplementary benefit is not being given. I believe, therefore, that this matter should be debated.

There are also many other people on small incomes, who are not in receipt of supplementary benefit, who receive no help with their heating bills. For example, three quarters of a million pensioners receive help with their rent or rates because their incomes are inadequate, but they do not receive supplementary benefit. During very cold weather they receive no help with their heating bills.

Surely one test of a civilised society is how far the Government are willing and able to assist those who can least afford to keep their homes warm. If people on ordinary incomes find that, because of the cold weather, they are facing difficulties over very large heating bills, how much more difficult will it be for those whose income is so low that literally every penny has to be counted? These are the people who should be helped.

I have made inquiries in my own area, the west midlands, and have found that the exceptionally severe weather payment is not being made. The Secretary of State for Social Services and other Ministers at the Department of Health and Social Security shrug off responsibility and say that it is nothing to do with them. Who, therefore, will decide this matter?

A debate is also needed because many people on small incomes receive no help. Either they have to face large bills or they have to turn off the heat and cover themselves in blankets, because they are terrified of receiving bills that they cannot possibly pay from the gas board or the electricity board.

For all these reasons, the Opposition believe that the Government should accept responsibility for the exceptionally severe weather payments. In those circumstances, I am asking for a debate under Standing Order No. 10.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the need for the exceptionally severe weather payment to be paid during the present very cold weather, and for other assistance to be provided by the Government for those on small limited incomes, especially the elderly, to help to pay fuel bills for heating purposes during this period."

I have listened, as has the House, with care and sympathy to the hon. Member, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Bates' Colliery

3.35 pm

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the refusal of the National Coal Board to accept the strong recommendation of the independent colliery review tribunal with respect to Bates' colliery in Blyth."

My submission can be made briefly, you will be pleased to hear, Mr. Speaker. Having sifted the evidence for days on end, an independent judicial tribunal, which was presided over by an eminent barrister, made a careful and reasoned judicial decision. It recommended that the pit in my constituency should be kept open and should not be closed, as proposed by the NCB.

Last Friday, the NCB considered the matter and, within five minutes, decided to close Horden colliery in County Durham, whose closure had been recommended earlier. After a four-hour debate, the NCB refused to accept the recommendation of the independent tribunal that the pit in my constituency should be kept open.

Urgent consideration of this matter is needed because the jobs of more than 1,400 men depend on the pit. They have been kept dangling by the chairman of the NCB who, with his usual nonchalant incompetence, has deliberately sought to flout the decision of an independent tribunal, having said in advance that it would give due weight to the tribunal's recommendations.

It is unique for one party in an arbitration case to refuse to accept a decision that is unfavourable to it and yet accept a decision that is favourable. That is what the chairman of the NCB has done. The result is that this pit, which has had a threat hanging over it for months on end, is to be kept waiting for many more weeks while the NCB chairman and his fellow directors ponder the matter afresh.

My respectful submission is that the NCB should accept the decision that was made after the evidence had been sifted and should put the men out of their agony. Many jobs in the coal mining community of Northumberland depend on this colliery. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, not to dismiss my application out of hand but to consider it carefully. The Government have shirked their responsibilities throughout. The Secretary of State for Energy and his junior Minister, who is sitting on the Treasury Bench——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): They are laughing. The Tories are laughing. Look at them.

Mr. Ryman: The Secretary of State has failed to intervene at any stage, although on many occasions I have asked him to do so. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to allow me to raise this urgent matter, giving it priority over other business, because so many jobs depend on this colliery.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the refusal of the National Coal Board to accept the strong recommendation of the independent colliery review tribunal with respect to Bute colliery in Blyth."

Mr. Ryman: Bates'.

Mr. Speaker: It is wrongly written down here. I should have said:

"Bates' colliery in Blyth."

I assure the hon. Member that I am not dismissing his application out of hand. He has been very persistent in this matter, but I regret that I must give him the same answer that I gave the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). I do not consider that the matter he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Leyland Bus

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I have a third application. Can I ask if this application arose from information that came into the hon. Gentleman's possession after 12 o'clock.?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Within 24 hours, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to raise a matter under Standing Order No. 10, which is urgent, important and specific namely,

"the anti-competitive nature of the Laird-Leyland-Department of Trade and Industry discussions on the future of Leyland Bus."

The matter is specific in so far as it relates to negotiations now going on between the Laird group, Leyland and Department of Industry officials on the future of Leyland Bus's three plants, which cover 2,500 workers.

The matter is important because I have learned that, despite assurances, the BL board is looking for the best deal for Leyland Bus, and the Department is deliberately obstructing interest shown by other parties who might be interested in exploratory discussions on the future of Leyland Bus. That means that the BL board is favouring the Leyland group in a most unreasonable and anti-competitive way.

The Department is acting against the public interest. The BL board knows the danger of the takeover. It knows that if Laird pulled diesel multiple units and railbus work out of Workington, it would be removing, at a stroke, all competition to Laird-Metro Cammell Weymour, thus denying the possibility of dual sourcing of rail products, and leaving Leyland Workington to produce buses in a declining market. All Leyland work on the diversification of products and the move into railbus, much of which is funded by the taxpayer, would be lost.

The BL board also knows that the Laird group's bus market is a tiddler in the business which, although produces a good product, is but one fifth the size of Leyland Bus in terms of output. It lacks Leyland's technological base, export expertise, and component-manufacturing capability in axles and gearboxes. Laird is the tiddler in the bus business, endeavouring to marshall the activities of the giant Leyland Bus. Leyland employees are most indignant about the way in which the matter is being handled.

The matter is urgent, because a decision on Laird is due in six weeks, and every day counts. If the objective of a retained and rationalised Leyland Bus reporting direct to the BL board is to be rejected, and the Government insist on privatisation, the company's negotiations should be open and above board, and invitations should go out to a number of parties inviting options. The Government are currently operating an inexcusable, highly irregular, closed-door, closed-shop series of negotiations.

Finally, the industry as a whole is bemused by the admissions in Laird Group's annual report 1984. That report accepts the inevitable decline of the British bus industry, yet that company will determine the future of the British bus industry. This is an admission of inability to bring the bus business round.

The matter is urgent. Every employee of Leyland Bus wants this debate to take place. They are worried about their future, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that you in your wisdom will give us the debate that we request.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The action of British Leyland, under instructions from the Department of Trade and Industry, in preventing the competitors of the Laird group from bidding for Leyland Bus."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Member has said. As he knows, my sole duty in considering an application under Standing Order No. 10 is to decide whether it should be given priority over the business already set down for this evening, or for tomorrow. I regret that I cannot find that the matter that he has raised meets all the criteria laid down in the Standing Order. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House. Doubtless he will find other ways of bringing the matter before the Chamber.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Immigration (Members' Representations)

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will remember various exchanges since the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. and learned Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington), made some wild allegations during Home Office questions that hon. Members had been using their powers wrongly in making representations for their constituents about immigration cases. A responsible member of my local press telephoned me to say that a written answer had been provided by the Minister, which states that there is to be a code of conduct for these matters, and that it is the product of negotiations between the parties. That is known to my local press. I was asked to comment on it, but I know nothing about it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) knows nothing about it either. Surely, this is an abuse.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to my hon. Friend's point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you and the Leader of the House, who is present, will look into the matter.

My hon. Friend has drawn your attention to two important matters. First, if this morning the Home Office released to the press the content of a parliamentary answer made today, it is a breach of what you regard as our most important rule, which is that no parliamentary answer should be released to the press before it has been made known to the House. Clearly that is a matter for you.

If that is the case, it draws attention to a second matter relating to the activities of the Home Office. It follows upon a leak of material which the Home Office is having to investigate, following information released to the Home Office about negotiations and correspondence between hon. Members and the Home Office which was in breach of the Official Secrets Act, and in which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has been involved. That is a most serious matter. Moreover, if the information given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is accurate, and it is claimed that negotiations on these matters have taken place between the Government and, presumably, me, I wish to make it perfectly clear that no such negotiations have taken place. Indeed, I have made it clear that we cannot negotiate without the authorisation of the parliamentary Labour party.

Those matters follow from the most important matter that my hon. Friend raised, which is whether the Home Office has released a parliamentary answer to the press before that answer has been given to the hon. Member concerned.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I notice that question No. 102 on the Order Paper, for written answer, is in the name of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence). The written answer would not normally become available to the hon. Gentleman until 3.30 pm, and he could withdraw his question until that time. It is now 3.47 pm. I have not seen the answer to the question, and I do not know whether the hon. and learned Gentleman has. I accept what the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has said, and I hope that the press has not disclosed the information. I have no knowledge of that.

Mr. Madden: Further to the point of order. Two important matters are at stake. The first concerns the rights of all hon. Members to make representations on behalf of people who, for one reason or another, are seeking to enter the United Kingdom but have been refused entry. I am sure that you would wish nothing to alter the right of hon. Members in these matters, unless the House has given approval to hon. Members' rights being diminished, altered or varied in any way.

The second matter was referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and relates to a Home Office investigation into extremely detailed disclosures that were made about representations on immigrations by hon. Members from all parties. I understand from various replies that I have received from parliamentary questions that that is an internal Home Office inquiry. I have been told that the information gathered so far is not sufficient to be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions and that the inquiry is due to be completed shortly.

It is an abuse of the House for the Executive, by administrative means, to seek in any way to diminish the rights of Members of the House on immigration matters. It is also an abuse to do that in advance of the findings of a Home Office internal inquiry designed to see whether the Official Secrets Act has been breached by the management of the immigration service or by officials in the Minister of State's office.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that nothing is done to change, vary or alter the rights of all hon. Members until the House has been given a full opportunity to hear from Ministers, what they are suggesting and so enable the House to express a view on the Executive's proposals.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman's point of order on the same subject?

Mr. Skinner: Oh, yes.

Mr. Speaker: And is it helpful?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, by all means.

The important thing to remember is that increasingly the Government have abused the use of procedure. We have had several references to that in the past few weeks. The result is that the Chair has to make rulings of a kind which the Chair should not have to make.

The whole matter should be investigated by the appropriate Committee, albeit after an investigation by yourself, Mr. Speaker. Until such time as somebody wields the authority in this place on behalf of all hon. Members—which means Back-Bench Members as well as Front-Bench Members—this tawdry Government will continue abusing their position in their authoritarian way. Tinpot junior Ministers as well as the Prime Minister will do the same as they have done today. It is time that someone demonstrated to them that, despite the Government's massive majority, they are not going to get away with their attacks upon Back-Benchers, civil

liberties and freedom in the country. The Chair could, on occasion, demonstrate the kind of will which would prevail to some degree on the Government.

Mr. Kaufman: In response to the points of order put by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), you have made it clear, Mr. Speaker, that a parliamentary answer can be withdrawn or changed or the question can be withdrawn before 3.30 pm. Therefore, it is an abuse of the House for a ministerial answer to be released to the press before 3.30 pm.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood has informed me during these exchanges that the journalist telephoned her before 1 pm today. That was two and a half hours before the deadline which you stated, Mr. Speaker, ought to be accepted by Ministers. It is obvious from examining question No. 102 that that is a planted question which the Minister asked the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) to put down.

This is not the first time that that has happened from the office of the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. and learned Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington). I would say, Mr. Speaker, that, apart from the other matters which have been put before you, for that office to have planted a question and then, in its own interests, to have released the answer before it was made known to Parliament, is an abuse of the House.

We ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker. We also ask the Leader of the House, quite apart from any inquiries that Mr. Speaker might make, to make inquiries and come to the House, state the facts and offer the House an apology and a promise that nothing like that will arise again from the office of the Minister of State.

Mr. Speaker: None of these matters really concerns me. I am not responsible for questions that are tabled or the answers that are given. However, if what the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) alleges is true, I would deprecate the giving of a written answer to the press before it has been given to the hon. Member concerned. That is clearly in breach of our conventions.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): If it will help the House, Mr. Speaker, I have heard what the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, and I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department to the allegations.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Well, does it relate to the point of order?

Mr. Williams: It relates to it and it concerns you, Mr. Speaker. While we welcome what the Leader of the House has just said, you will recollect, Mr. Speaker, that on Friday you were put in an invidious position because of the issue of a statement on a point of order. I do not want to resurrect that issue, but half an hour before that statement was made on a point of order, which means that it is not available for questioning in the House, it was circulating——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot go back on what happened last Friday, with the best will in the world. This is Tuesday.

Mr. Williams: But, Mr. Speaker, you are saying that it is wrong for the Government to issue information to the press before it is issued to the House. We had an instance when you were put in an embarrassing position because a Minister did that. You will recollect that the Minister of State, Treasury had asked you and the House for permission to make a statement on the Friday about the Civil Service. That statement had been released to the press over an hour before it was made in the House. While the assurance that we have had from the Leader of the House is welcome, it does not touch on the basic issue, which is that the Government are putting you and the House in an embarrassing position.

Mr. Speaker: We must not go back over the events of last Friday, but I repeat what I said then: the making of a statement by way of a point of order is to be deprecated and should not be followed in future. As I understand it, the press release was given from the Prime Minister's office and not by the Leader of the House — [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—as I understand it.

Freedom of Speech (Universities and Institutions of Higher Education)

3.56 pm

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to safeguard the right of free speech in universities and institutions of higher education, including student unions; to establish the duties and powers necessary for the enforcement of this right; and for connected purposes.

The Bill should not be necessary and it is sad that it is. Free speech is central to universities and institutions of higher education. They, above all, should be looking for the widest possible boundary of free speech. It is there that new and old ideas should be put to the test and we should be able to think the unthinkable. That tradition has been widely challenged, especially in student unions, by the adoption of the practice known as the low platform policy. That means, in effect, that persons who hold views different from those who adopt such a policy are refused the opportunity to express those views within the precincts of the university.

All sorts of means are used to enforce the policy. Violence, blockades, megaphones, noise, spitting and the throwing of objects have been used in a most disgraceful manner. That has eaten into university traditions.

The right of free speech at universities is no more extensive than it is outside them. It is bound by the law of slander and the law against incitement to violence and racial hatred. If there were a need further to limit that law, it should be done in the House and not by a gang of Fascists masquerading as university students.

That practice is now widespread. There have been a number of examples in the city of Manchester. On 1 March last year, a leaflet was put out to prevent my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) from speaking. The leaflet clearly says that he should be prevented from speaking. At the same university, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) has been daubed with red paint. Recently, my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Home Office was attacked and prevented from speaking. That matter is now under investigation.

Incidents occur not only in Manchester. Alas, they are now widespread throughout the country. In Nottingham, the South African ambassador was turned back from speaking, and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt)—not known as a rabid Right-winger—was refused access to the platform. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was drowned out by noise and megaphones at Nottingham and Bristol. At Warwick, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science was prevented from speaking. At York, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) was prevented from speaking. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) has been stopped at Bristol and Bradford. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) was stopped at Kingston polytechnic. Those cases can be multiplied elsewhere.

Outside speakers are not the only people involved; students are also involved. The chairman of the Conservative Association at Swansea was banned because it was said that merely to be a Conservative was to be a racist. In Aberystwyth, the Conservative Society was banned because it was affiliated to the Federation of Conservative Students.

This problem affects not only members of the Conservative party. The right hon. Member of Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has been pelted at Sussex university. The most dishonourable case was at Sunderland Polytechnic, where the Jewish Society was banned on the pretext that all Zionists are racists.

From the objectionable to the absurd, Guildford law school banned the Solicitor-General on the pretext that his speaking to lawyers would cause a disturbance.

Some universities have acted and tried to tackle the matter. Warwick university imposed a fine of £30,000 on the students' union for activities against the Secretary of State. Sussex has disciplined its students, and York has taken students to court. After a shaky start and despite a sit-in, Manchester is now disciplining its students. However, those measures are not entirely satisfactory. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North received a letter today informing him that, despite the court action taken by the Vice-Chancellor of York, he is again banned from appearing because of fear of disruption.

What about the milk and water reaction of Bristol, Bradford, Nottingham, Sunderland poly, or the Guildford school of law? Mr. Bensley of that school was quoted in the press as saying that the visits of VIPs and controversial figures damage the college's reputation.

There are other methods of harassment. At Reading, an additional charge was made for security and insurance to allow a meeting of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The Secretary of State asked the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom to issue guidelines, and last December it did so. The principles that have been adopted are fine. They say:

"The vice-chancellor's committee urges all universities to protect and promote lawful freedom of speech and of assembly and to take effective action against conduct which infringes these vitally important rights and their lawful exercise."

That sounds fine and I fully approve, but the recommendations have too many doors through which the activists can bolt. The vice-chancellors' committee invisages that the threat of disorder should be sufficient for the vice-chancellors to ban meetings. That would be an open invitation to those who adopt no platform policies to threaten disruption as a means of preventing the meeting from taking place. The vice-chancellors see difficulties in policing, getting witnesses to attend and inviting police on to the premises and on the layout of the buildings. They envisage difficulties arising from the delegation of responsibility to the students' union. All that is a matter of priority. If the priority is to maintain freedom of speech, those are difficulties to be overcome not excuses to be paraded.

For that reason, unfortunately, I believe that it is necessary to back up the vice-chancellors' intentions with the force of law, especially as it is possible that their recommendations will be followed by the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics.

My Bill would impose a duty upon university authorities to maintain the right of free speech for all persons lawfully on their premises who wish to exercise that right within the limits of the general law. That duty would apply to the premises of student unions, which

avoids any doubt on that matter. There would be a duty on students and members of the universities to assist the university authorities in the discharge of their duty.

Obviously, it would be right and proper for universities to claim that they had taken all reasonable steps in the discharge of that duty, and the Bill provides for that. However, the Bill states that we should take into account elementary things that universities should do to qualify for having taken reasonable steps. Those steps should include a proper disciplinary code, adequate action against offenders, fines on student unions, where appropriate, arrangements properly made with the organisers of meetings and arrangements for the admission of the police, where necessary. Non-discrimination in the use of facilities by persons of different shades of opinion should also be included. The Bill provides that cancellation of or refusal to hold a meeting should not normally be accepted as reasonable exercise of the duty.

The object of the Bill is to bring the standards of the laggards up to those of the best. When students have had a chance to vote on those matters and express a view—as they have done in Swansea, York and Manchester and in the National Union of Students after what happened at Sunderland polytechnic—they have shown great sense in that they wish to expunge that vile attitude from universities. Those who stop free speech have no place in an institution of learning.

The Bill will have the widespread support of all those who have the good interests of universities and institutions of higher education at heart.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Fred Silvester, Mr. Gerald Bowden, Mr. David Madel, Mr. Robert Rhodes James, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. William Shelton, Mr. Robin Squire, Mr. Patrick Thompson, Sir William van Straubenzee and Mrs. Ann Winterton.

Freedom of Speech (Universities and Institutions of Higher Education)

Mr. Fred Silvester accordingly presented a Bill to safeguard the right of free speech in universities and institutions of higher education, including student unions; to establish the duties and powers necessary for the enforcement of this right; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 March and to be printed. [Bill 80.]

Orders of the Day

Wages Bill

Orders for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal party.

4.7 pm

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The central purpose of the Bill is to create employment opportunities, especially for young people, but changing the rules governing wage payment, as the Bill proposes, will have other worthwhile results as well. It will not only promote employment and industrial efficiency, but will give rights to workers to ensure that they receive the wages due to them. It will help to break down barriers of status and conditions between manual and non-manual workers, and it will to a small extent reduce opportunities for crime.

The Bill is based on the central economic objective to which the Government have held since 1979 — to achieve an efficient and modern economy where economic growth is accompanied by low inflation, enabling us to compete in international markets and produce real, sustainable, productive jobs. To achieve that we need an efficient and productive private sector, not hampered by unnecessary Government-imposed regulations and restrictions. Secondly, we need an efficient labour market, where there are the minimum of constraints on the rights of employers and employees to agree to offer and accept jobs on contractual terms that suit them both.

We must recognise that social conditions change, and legislation that was perfectly acceptable, indeed extremely desirable, in one age may be quite unsuitable in another. The Bill deals with a legacy of enactments spanning 150 years that have all, in different ways, served their purpose and now need urgent change.

The Truck Acts were passed in the reign of William IV and were designed to deal with Victorian abuses where workers were paid in kind or forced to spend their wages at the company shop. Today, they are preventing desirable moves to non-cash methods of wage payment and the greater harmonisation of the conditions of manual and non-manual workers.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle Upon Tyne, North): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said that what is needed is the right of employers and employees to accept work on conditions that are acceptable to both. How can he seriously say that when he knows that this legislation will create the situation in which people will have to take jobs at £30 a week? Surely to God, this cannot be widely accepted.

Mr. Clarke: Perhaps I might first set out the objectives of the Bill and give details of the wages councils in order to refute the parody of the Bill which the hon. Gentleman has just given. There is no question of people willingly accepting wages far below what they can receive from social security.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I am not on that point, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue.

Mr. Heffer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest respect, I am not on that point. I was making some general introductory remarks and explaining that the Bill was designed to sweep away the legacy of the past and a series of enactments designed for social conditions of a different age.

I had said that the Truck Acts dated back to 1831 and were originally designed to deal with the situation where workers were paid in tokens or were made to buy goods in company shops. Today, they are preventing a desirable changeover to non-cash methods of wage payment. Wages councils were originally designed to deal with Edwardian abuses, such as poverty wages, long hours, poor health and safety conditions. Exploitation was easy of workers who had no modern welfare state to fall back on when out of work. Today, there are shorter hours of work and some of the strictest health and safety legislation, yet wages councils are still able to regulate every last detail of the employment contract of every employee in every company in large sectors of industry.

When we look at the history of legislation on redundancy rebates, we see that these rebates were designed to encourage employers to shed labour in the 1960s when labour shortages in the overheated economy of the west midlands and elsewhere were a major impediment to growth. Today, the rebates provide a perverse public subsidy to redundancy in an age when, I imagine, we all agree that unemployment is our major economic and social problem.

I believe that when one looks at the history of the various regulations which we are reforming today, it is a perfect demonstration of the conservatism of this country and the resistance to change of any kind that we encounter in our society that we are introducing these reforms in the year 1986.

Let me explain in detail the objectives of the Bill. The first objective is to promote employment. We will do this by simplifying the wages councils orders, by removing outdated restrictions on the method of paying wages, by ensuring that growing and prospering companies do not meet an unfair share of the costs of supporting those which run into difficulties, and by ensuring that young workers can get their foot on the employment ladder by accepting jobs at wages which employers are willing to offer and they are willing to accept, without wages councils preventing the jobs from being offered by insisting on higher rates of pay. We will also ensure that wages councils think about the employment effects when they take their decisions.

The second major new reform is to provide major new rights to employees to ensure they do not suffer unlawful deductions from pay. The third objective is to reduce barriers of status between manual and non-manual workers, by removing laws which have had the undesirable effect of preventing similar terms and conditions of employment being offered to all workers. Finally, we aim, to a modest extent, to reduce crime by removing impediments to the growth of cashless pay, thus reducing opportunities for wages snatches and theft.

I shall now briefly set out what the Bill does and why, and I shall give way at appropriate moments.

The first part of the Bill deals with controls on the payment of wages. It sweeps away a host of ancient and obsolete laws, based on the Truck Acts, governing the way in which wages are paid. The most important provision that we are sweeping away is the right of manual workers to insist on being paid in cash. We propose to remove this provision because it acts as an impediment to the spread of cashless pay, which is preferable for a variety of reasons.

First, it costs, on average, about 50p per wage payment to pay in cash. On the other hand, it costs about 4p by the cheapest non-cash method. The Act is completely out of date in the cashless society in which we live. We are steadily going over to a more cashless society. At the moment, about 39 per cent. of wage payments in Britain are made in cash, against, for example, 5 per cent. in West Germany and 1 per cent. in the United States of America. It seems ironic that long ago we ceased to pay the unemployed in cash — an unemployed person now receives his benefit by girocheque—but we retain these archaic laws for the payment of manual workers.

The other thing that will be achieved is greater security. There were about 450 reported armed robberies at factories or on offices or on the public highway in 1984, many of which were wage snatches. That figure was up by 100 on the 1983 figure. Many of those wage snatches involved great violence to workpeople in charge of money. There is always a greater risk of theft from individuals if a pay packet contains cash. From my experience at the Bar, I have known many criminals who, if only they knew it, had every reason to be grateful to the Truck Acts for the opportunities that they provide for highly profitable wages snatches in the midlands.

The age of the old law is shown by the distinction that it draws between manual labourers and other employees. Non-manual workers have never been covered by the Truck Acts and enjoy many fringe benefits that are not offered to manual workers. They do not get paid in tokens, and they do not have to go to the company shop, but they do get company cars, and they do get health insurance not usually offered by employers to manual workers, even if they want to, for fear of one of the employees invoking the Truck Acts and pointing out a breach.

This is not the only reason for differences in status, but it has tended to increase and perpetuate differences in conditions and status between white-collar and blue-collar workers which have absolutely no place in a modern industrialised society. I ought to emphasise that this part of the Bill does not take away any existing contractual right to payment in cash. It does not force any employer to change to a non-cash payment system if he does not want to.

The Bill introduces an important new and modern set of rights for workers in respect of deductions from pay. At the same time as it sweeps away the ancient provisions of the Truck Acts, new provisions will make unlawful any deduction from pay not provided for in statute, in the contract of employment or by written agreement. The Bill provides extra protection for deductions related to stock or cash deficiencies, which are limited to 10 per cent. of wages. It provides a new right of complaint to an industrial tribunal, and it provides similar controls on payments by workers to employers.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): The Paymaster General has made a point of informing the House that there is nothing in the Bill that will force an employer to change to a cashless system if he so desires. What about the

employee? Is he given any protection, so that he can refuse to accept the instruction when his employer decides to change to a cashless system?

Will the Paymaster General make the point that there have been many occasions when trade unions representing employers' work forces have entered into voluntary agreements with the employers to move to a cashless system? Why does he have to force this system on employees who may not necessarily want it?

Mr. Clarke: I expect that a growing number of companies will negotiate with their trade unions, where the work forces are unionised, before changing to a cashless system. However an employer and the bulk of employees may wish to move, the fact is that under existing legislation, a manual employee has the right to insist on being paid in cash and can point out that any other arrangement is in breach of the Truck Acts. That has held back movements in the direction of cashless pay in many industries where the bulk of the work force would be content to transfer. As the hon. Gentleman knows, on entering into agreements many unions have discovered that it pays everyone to change because the savings made by the employer can sometimes be shared with the work force.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): The Minister referred to the savings that can be made. Earlier he said that the cashless system would cost 4p per transaction, whereas a cash system costs 50p per transaction. That will provide a 46p benefit. As an inducement, will the Minister instruct employers to use that money to make concessions to employees if they accept the new method?

Mr. Clarke: In modern circumstances, all those arrangements for pay should be open for discussion between the employer and his work force. The hon. Gentleman's point has not been lost on many negotiators and firms that have already made the change, but the Government do not intend to cover it in statutory form.

We shall replace the old legislation with the new rights that I have just described, which match today's society and which were broadly supported in our consultation exercise. For the first time, they provide a comprehensive, easily understood, easily enforceable and fairer set of statutory rights concerning deductions from all workers, manual and non-manual, and they give special protection to groups such as petrol station cashiers to ensure that their entire pay packets are not devoured by deductions for stock or cash shortages.

Part II, which will be the most controversial part of the Bill, deals with wages councils. Here, our main reforms are aimed at simplifying the requirements that wages councils impose on industry. We shall enable the councils to set a basic level of remuneration, basic and overtime, and a limit on deductions for accommodation, but we shall not allow them to involve themselves in every last detail of the employment relationship, as many do now. We shall take young people out of the scope of the councils. We are sure that the minima set by councils in the past have sometimes damaged the job prospects of young workers.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): What evidence is there that the wage rates set for young people under the wages councils destroy jobs? What is the market level to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman expects the ending of protections to drive wages down? Does he accept the figures provided by his Department in answer to questions from me, which show that since the Government came to office in 1979 school leavers' wages have dropped by 12 per cent. for boys and by 13 per cent. for girls while youth unemployment has trebled? Wages have decreased, but that has not created jobs for school leavers.

Mr. Clarke: Most of the reduction has taken place during the past two years, when the employment of young people has increased. Many academic studies have been carried out which, as the hon. Gentleman knows from the questions that he repeatedly asks of my Department, all come to varying conclusions on the figures. When we considered the total abolition of the wages councils last year, the academics disagreed about the precise extent to which employment would be increased by such a move. However, the academic research is backed by everyone's experience: if the pay of school leavers and other young people is set above the value that they can add to the business, if it is too close to adult rates, or if it is brought into line with adult rates too quickly, people prefer to employ older, experienced workers. That is the experience in industry.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): My right hon. and learned Friend said that wages councils will no longer cover people aged 21 or under. What effect will the proposal have on the employment of youngsters who attain the age of 21, or whatever the cut-off age may be? Will not their position be less secure?

Mr. Clarke: One can justify paying someone the adult rate when he has acquired some experience and skill and a track record of employment in a trade. If an employer is given a straight choice between an experienced adult worker who has a background of work in that trade, and a young school leaver or someone who is learning the business, and if there is no sharp distinction in pay, he will almost invariably choose the older worker. The wages councils have striven to set legal minima for young people's wages that are too close to the adult rate. They have changed to the full adult rate at too yound an age. That has also happened in many non-wages council industries as a result of national wage bargaining and bargains struck by some trade unions. The effect of that practice is to make it more difficult for youngsters to obtain jobs than would otherwise be true.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that I still run a business, which is restrained by the exigencies of the licensed non-residential wages council? Is he further aware that, for many years, the terms and conditions laid down by that wages council were such that they just about came to the market minima, but that during the period of inflation in the late 1970s they managed to extract wage increases and increases in terms and conditions which have now become a serious restraint on employment? Therefore, whenever I have a job vacancy, I must think hard about whether I can afford to fill it. Will not the Government's action enable employers to take a much more realistic and perhaps flexible view on employing youngsters for vacancies—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When Opposition Members respond by attempting to barrack an

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experienced employer—no one could describe my hon. Friend as a hardhearted, Gradgrind, Victorian employer—and to ignore what is repeatedly asserted by many people in the catering, retail and other trades, that wages council orders are too complex and unintelligible, impose terms and conditions that are too expensive, and that they take young people's wages too close to adult wages, so that employing people is something that must be undertaken with care and only some yound people can be offered jobs, they damage the job prospects of many people.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): If my right hon. and learned Friend is convinced that wages council rates destroy jobs for young people and price them out of the market, is it not also possible that wages council rates could price older people out of jobs? He mentioned the young person having been trained and the employer being happy to keep him on at the higher rate when he reached the age of 21. Would that not be to the disadvantage of an adult who was untrained, who was less able and who was perhaps a member of an immigrant minority? Would it not price him out of work, too?

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend knows, many of the wages council orders made for adults are lengthy and complex and purport to deal with every detail of the employment contract. Many are near-unintelligible to employer and employee when attempts are made to interpret them, and instead of setting a minimum rate below which adults should not be employed, there are increasing allegations that many wages councils have tried to set a going rate as part of ordinary negotiations. Therefore, we wish to simplify the orders so that they set only a basic minimum rate for ordinary hours, a single rate for overtime and some restrictions on deductions that can be made for accommodation. Those simplified wages council orders will be less of a deterrent to the employment of adults than the present ones.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Will the Paymaster General be more specific about the rates being too high? For example, a youth in hairdressing can earn £31·75 a week, or in retail, £47 a week. Does he believe that those rates are far too high to be paid to a youngster?

Mr. Clarke: For the school leaver who is starting from scratch in a trade where at first he can add no value to the business at all, and who has to be trained, some of those rates have a deterrent effect, particularly if the employer has the choice between taking on an extra young person and taking on an experienced worker from somewhere else. We believe that the right level of pay in those circumstances is the pay which the young person himself or herself wants to take in order to get some experience in the trade, and which an employer is willing to give.

It is no good the hon. Gentleman and others believing that they are protecting young people against low pay if the consequences of the provisions which they defend will actually leave a young person unemployed altogether because he or she has been priced out of the market.

Mr. Prescott *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: My speech is being turned into a seminar, and I am not actually in the seminar-giving business.

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. He is making extremely important points about Government judgments. If one follows the logic of what the Paymaster General is saying, we shall be back to the 19th century, where those who trained paid the employer for the privilege of being trained at the place of work. I inform the Paymaster General that that is already happening in some London hotels today.

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest respect, the reference to the 19th century is the point that I was making a few moments ago. It is true that in the 19th century, people made a payment for training. It is true also that when the wages councils, then called the trade boards, were introduced in Edwardian England, shop assistants slept under the counter, and for them the alternative to employment in that shop was destitution on the streets. Those are not the conditions that we meet now. The wages councils have moved so far beyond the original intention that they have highly elaborate wages orders and lay down detailed conditions and terms of service which price people out of a job altogether.

I have made the basic case and, I hope, explained why we are making the changes to the Truck Acts. In all the orders that we make now we require wages councils to consider explicitly the employment consequences of decisions that they take, which in my opinion is only common sense. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said, these requirements need to be written into some of the statutory conditions governing wages councils.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) asked why we retain the councils at all. Their continued existence might, in his opinion, have a damaging effect on adult employees. We are making it easier to review, and if need be to change the scope of, or to abolish, the existing councils, but we have retained the councils because the consultation process that we carried out in the summer showed that many employers and trade unions still feel a need for them.

The number of wages councils has been falling steadily for many years. There were 66 in 1953, and that figure has fallen to the present 26. The last Labour Government abolished at least eight councils between 1974 and 1979, including the road haulage council and the milk distributive council. Given that I believe that mistaken statutory minimum wage controls can damage employment, I hope that other industries will continue to be weaned away from the process of statutory pay fixing and move over to a more satisfactory arrangement.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is speaking about the Secretary of State's powers to change the wages councils, will he explain to the House why he has abolished the Secretary of State's power to create new wages councils, because he has frequently reminded the House, quite rightly, that we live in rapidly changing times, with new trades and new occupations. Why should the Secretary of State's power to cover some of these be gratuitously struck from the law?

Mr. Clarke: I have to make it clear that I do not see a great role for statutory minimum wage fixing, or wage fixing at all, in today's society. It was only after consultation that we decided to retain them in those

industries where both the employers and the trade unions did not feel ready to embark on the kind of world that we are used to in other industries, where these things are freely negotiated and entered into by both parties.

I see no scope whatever for increasing the number of wages councils. I do not see the tide of economic history reversing itself. I do not think that we shall get the present number of unemployed down to an acceptable level in the immediate future. Therefore, I see no case whatever for creating new wages councils and giving rise to the risk of cutting back job prospects in more industries if we start expanding them again.

Most of the interventions have been about young persons. These proposals will allow greater freedom to negotiate a remuneration package for young workers to get them into employment. This will help young people to find jobs. The key point, which is the point on which we are divided and on which this debate will turn, is that, in our opinion, employers will not offer employment to anyone unless they are confident that the worker will be able to add at least his own value to the business. At the moment, young workers are at a disadvantage when there are older workers available who can offer greater experience and skill. The reforms will help young workers to get into jobs and to get that vital first foothold on the employment ladder.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and others remain sceptical, and the hon. Gentleman asks about the studies. The studies have shown that the wages-councils set the rates for young workers higher, relative to older workers, than is commonly the case in the private sector and in voluntary agreements. A study comparing wages councils' rates with those in 73 voluntary agreements — a study which was conducted not by the Government but by the independent journal, *Industrial Relations Review and Report*, last August — found that two thirds of wages councils set a 16-year-old rate at 65 per cent. or more of the adult rate, but that half the voluntary agreements set a 16-year-old rate at 60 per cent. or less of the adult rate.

In my opinion, one of the problems in this country is the non-voluntary agreement. We have had a tendency to set school leavers' wages too high in relation to those of adults. Not only do the wages councils set young persons' wages too high in relation to adults' wages, but in some cases they tend to put the minimum age at which someone goes on to the full adult rate too low as well.

Mr. Nellist: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not recognise that wages councils rates for 16 and 17-year-olds as a proportion of the adult rate under those same wages councils orders are higher than for industries outside the wages councils? One does not pay bills by percentages and proportions. One pays them in pounds and pence, and for young workers in wages councils one is talking about £30 a week as compared to £60 or £70 a week. Outside those industries, unions are negotiating far higher rates of pay, and even if the proportion of young workers is lower, it means that those young workers are on £50, £60 or £70. That is the essential difference.

Mr. Clarke: Not every low-paid worker is covered by wages councils. That obviously must be general. Other workers are paid at far below the average. When a school leaver gets his first job, the value that he can add to the business can be quite slight. The young person of today has many alternatives behind him — the back-up, the social security system, and so on—to which he can turn if the job is unacceptable. If he is justified in refusing it, it is wrong for the law to stop him.

I must point out to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East that relatively few young workers have the family responsibility that older workers have, which is why they expect to take lower wages. For those young workers who have heavy family responsibilities — indeed, in my opinion, for the low-paid in general—that are expensive and difficult to maintain on low pay, there is support such as family income supplement, and in due course the Government will introduce the much-improved family credit system.

In my opinion, financial additions of that kind to pay are the best way to keep young workers with families in work, so that they can in due course gain experience and move on to better paid openings. It is wrong to contemplate the small number of young people with family commitments and insist that everybody is paid the statutory minimum — single or living at home or wherever they may be — with the result that they are priced out of jobs.

Mr. John Townend: Are not my right hon. and learned Friend's arguments strongly supported by the action in recent years of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union? It appreciated that the number of apprenticeships in its industries, was dropping because of high starting rates and reduced the starting rates for apprentices by 40 per cent., which resulted in a larger increase in the number of electrician apprentices, at a time when the number of those in all the other crafts were declining.

Mr. Clarke: I quite agree. As my hon. Friend and I know, the EETPU lives in a different world from that in which most of the trade unions and the Labour movement live. The EETPU lives in today's world, where we are trying to get competitive industries and improve people's job prospects. The Labour party and many in the trade union movement still live in Victorian and Edwardian England and defend the statutory provisions in a way which is quite destructive of employment prospects.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): In my constituency I have to live in 1986, and the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers also lives in 1986. There are many problems in the tailoring industry. The union has pointed out to me that research at Cambridge in the applied economics department has shown that, when pay goes up as a result of the activities of the wages councils, there are expanded job opportunities. Have the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his officials looked at different industries and the effects of such councils in different industries, rather than dealing with them all in a blanket way?

Mr. Clarke: The National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers, and many of its employers, to be fair, live in a world in which they have known wages councils for many years, and find it difficult to contemplate a world without them. As a result of consultation, that industry is keeping its council, which will make its simplified orders.

I am familiar with the work at Cambridge, which attempted to refute another study carried out within our

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Department. There is no difference in the data, but the interpretation by the academics of Cambridge differs from that made by others and, in their opinion, they make the case that increasing wages will increase employment prospects. I shall not go into the arguments now, as I am sure that we shall do so in Committee. A detailed answer to that case has been prepared by the competing academics. The Cambridge academics' theory is based on the idea that there is a shortage of employees in the tailoring and garment industry and that more women would be attracted to seek jobs in the industry if the pay were increased. I do not believe that argument, and it is not accepted. However, it is an arguable idea based on an interpretation of data from which most other academics have come up with quite the opposite conclusion.

It is clear that if the statutory minima are placed at the level at which they were in several of these trades, we shall reduce employment prospects for many people.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): There has been a difference of interpretation by the Department of Employment. The Secretary of State for Employment in 1981 said the abolition of wages councils, particularly with regard to young people,

"would be unlikely to lead to more than a very marginal increase in job opportunities in these categories."

While there is a difference of opinion on the survey, there is also a major difference of interpretation between the Department of Employment in 1981 and the right hon. and learned Gentleman now.

Mr. Clarke: That is an old study, and it still comes to the conclusion that there will be little more than a "marginal increase". The main difference between the various academics and others who have looked at, for example, the effect of total abolition is that they have disagreed in their results as to the extent to which there will be more jobs. Some have said that there would not be a great increase in new jobs and others have said that the increase in new jobs would be substantial. Even the report which the hon. Gentleman selected, which is one of the less enthusiastic about the reforms that we are suggesting, talks about an increase in employment, albeit marginal. We believe that it will be more substantial than that.

I have asserted the case, no doubt at sufficient length. In general terms, I ask the House to consider the reaction that it would expect employers to take to any part of the cost to their business. I do not regard labour as just another commodity, and I do not think that one can apply the rules of the market to the employment of people. However, if a system is introduced the aim of which is to put the cost of labour above that which it would otherwise be if freely entered into by an employer and an employee, by making labour more expensive people will be even less willing to take on labour and will look for labour-saving alternatives. That was not the problem in Edwardian England, or in the 1960s, but nowadays it is undoubtedly a problem when we have high unemployment. If the House means what it says about its concern for the unemployed, it should join us in repealing outdated legislation which is unintentionally restricting job opportunities.

Part III has the same purpose behind it, but deals with a different subject. Here we are limiting the payment of redundancy rebate, which is no longer a priority for public spending, to employers with fewer than 10 employees. This does not affect the statutory right of the individual employee to receive a redundancy payment from his employer or from the Department of Employment if the employer is unable to pay it. The payment of redundancy rebates in today's conditions is simply not appropriate. Public spending committed to making it easier for people to make their work force redundant must take a lower priority than the public spending on which we are embarking, to promote new jobs in tourism and leisure, to give added support to those going into self-employment and for the initiative by which we are trying to give assistance to the long-term unemployed.

This is a Bill to promote employment. It will do this by easing the regulation of the labour market and removing burdens on employers. It will have a modest but significant effect on the employment level. It is a Bill to enable employers to employ workers under modern conditions without being hamstrung by legislation and controls that are a legacy of yesterday's problems and yesterday's social attitudes, whether the problem was the Victorian "tommy shop", the Edwardian sweatshop, or the overmanned shopfloor of the 1960s. Few Bills can claim such a wide sweep of simplifying and clarifying the accumulation of over 150 years of different sorts of controls dealing with quite different problems.

The Bill is one of the most radical acts of deregulation in wage payment ever undertaken. It replaces 13 whole Acts, over 20 orders and parts of other legal instruments with just one enactment. The Bill is an important part of the Government's strategy to create jobs and ease burdens on employers.

I shall not labour again my view of the Labour party's approach to these matters in what will obviously be its defence of the Truck Acts, wages councils, redundancy rebates and the lot. I have long suspected that a party that spends a great deal of time invoking the Tolpuddle martyrs and has a tendency to talk about the Taff Vale judgment and the strike of the match women in London in today's political scene is likely to react in a somewhat backward looking way to such things.

After looking at the debates on the Shops Bill, I have no doubt that we are likely to find some echoes of a speech made by my old hero, Lord Stockton, in the other place. He once converted me to Conservatism, and now he complains that we have lost our sense of paternalism. I have always rejected the paternalism of the Fabians, the smothering paternalism of the Webbs, and so on, but I have talked about the proposals for the family credit scheme to help those on low pay with family obligations. We certainly protect the health and safety of those at work. A modern paternalism in 1986 should be concerned, among other things, with a reduction in the burden of taxation and national insurance contributions on the pay earned by those on low wages. Protection of the weak should above all look at the employment prospects of people and the jobs that they require, and consider legislation in the light of its likely effect on the jobs in the market.

It is a rather whiskery Victorian father-figure who would defend the Truck Acts and detailed wages councils orders in 1986. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) does not fit the bill, but he will be using the argument of a Victorian father. The Bill is an important part of the Government's strategy to create jobs, ease burdens on employers, and tackle today's problems, and I commend it to the House.

4.49 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Paymaster General became less convincing as he proceeded to examine the Bill and especially when in conclusion, he quoted the rhetoric of the press statement issued by his Department. In fact, he read that statement with the least conviction.

The Minister said that he did not envisage a reversal of history but the Bill has all the signs of the 19th century — mass unemployment, the reduction of employees' rights and the reduction of trade union and collective rights at the place of work. All these rights are part and parcel of the Government's legislation because they see them as obstacles to the work of the market. The philosophy of the Minister is that the market would determine a lower rate of pay than that which is determined by legislation and thus more people would be employed at a lower rate of pay. That is the basis of the Government's approach.

We will oppose this Bill without hesitation. It is a piece of Tory legislation which talks about the rhetoric of rights and the increase of jobs. It is concerned with reducing those rights and reducing employment opportunities. The Bill has been conceived under 19th-century standards for 20th-century conditions. It continues the Government's role of denouncing international standards — they have denounced more international legislation than any other previous Government. The Bill will reduce the rights of employees and tilt the balance of power in favour of the employer.

The Bill will further increase part-time, low-paid, poverty employment of which we have seen so much in the past few years. It will reduce the wages of those who are lowest paid and will, ironically, further increase the costs for the small employer. The Bill is designed to attack the lowest paid, poorly organised sector of our work force, especially women, who are the majority of employees in the industries to which the Bill refers. It will also specifically affect the youth.

The Government have produced the Bill in the wholly unsubstantiated belief that a cut in wages, which will follow from this reduction of legislation, will lead to more jobs. There was nothing in the Minister's speech that justified that controversial assertion in favour of the legislation.

I reiterate the incontrovertible effects of the Bill. It continues to denounce international agreement on fair employment practices which all previous Governments have observed. Indeed, Lord Stockton made a number of judgments based on this type of legislation in the past. However, I do not intend to refer to him, as suggested by the Minister. The Government are turning the might of legislation and rights on those who are least able to bear the increasing burden. It is a process which no other Government have followed. This process was started by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) who brought before the House the other International Labour Organisation resolution, and denounced the convention on fair wages. The process was continued with the denunciation of the rights of association.

In the Bill the Government have now denounced the convention on the Truck Acts and the convention dealing with wages councils. Of the 92 countries which signed this convention, we are the only country to denounce the international standards for maintaining decent conditions for those who work in industries which are recognised as low paid and poorly organised. We agreed international convention standards because of these factors.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have denounced those conventions because we believe we can replace them with more up-to-date legislation. However, we have ratified six new conventions and we continue to ratify conventions which, in our opinion, suit the labour needs and the needs of the unemployed and others.

Mr. Prescott: Every Government ratify all sorts of conventions — that is their purpose — but they do not accompany them with denunciations of the existing standards agreed by other countries. The Government have a terrible role when judged by other civilised countries. The Government have been referred to the Court of Human Rights for breaching rights more often than any other Government. The Government have a history of breaching fair employment practices and fair human rights as decided by convention. It is on the record for all to see.

Mr. Hickmet: The hon. Gentleman condemns the Government for renouncing those ILO agreements. Despite those agreements, the rates paid to young people by employers who stick to those agreements are lower than those maintained by many of the existing wages councils.

Mr. Prescott: Youth wages are a central issue and whether those wages are higher in this country than elsewhere. However, one needs a comparison of rates and I have never heard anyone quote the actual rates which are at issue. We have tried to get a statement from the Paymaster General — we have asked him what rate of pay he considers to be excessive for a youngster in employment. One would need to compare that rate with the adult rate, but I feel there is much rubbish talked about comparisons between those rates.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's proposals to introduce Sunday trading must also be seen against the background of the Bill? Many of us, on the ground of civil liberties, might be in favour of people's right to buy and sell on a Sunday, but we cannot possibly support that when this type of legislation is introduced. This Bill will affect the wages and working conditions of the people who work in the retail trade.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend has made a powerful point. The Sunday trading legislation has not yet appeared before the House, but I understand that in its progress through another place it has been made clear that the rights of youngsters not to work on Sundays—except by rights contained in the previous Shops Acts—will be denied. I understand that the Government have moved an amendment to forestall the implementation of that denial for two years. How convenient that will be—after the next general election. People will not be aware that those rights are to be denied to young people. When the debate comes to this House, we will be able to explore that point more effectively.

The Bill continues to reduce the range of employees rights built up under successive Governments. The Government intend to reverse the advances of the workers. One classic example is unfair dismissal, which was brought in by Tory trade union legislation. That legislation was retained by the Labour Government but this Government now seek to reduce the rights over unfair

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dismissal. The right to work is a classic right of the people but it has been denied by this Government with their massive unemployment levels of between 4 million and 5 million people.

The Minister spoke about the equality of rights and said that deductions from people's wages could be freely negotiated between the parties. The unemployment level of between 4 million and 5 million is one heck of a pressure which the employer can apply to the employee —accept the conditions or join the millions on the dole. They are not equal partners in the negotiations. Mass unemployment conditions people to accept the driving down of rates of pay which is implicit in the Bill.

Maternity rights, supplementary benefit rights and rights to take cases to a tribunal, all of which have been embodied by the House, have been nibbled away or got rid of. The Bill is in line with that process. The Government are now saying that there is a right to agree cash payments. The right hon. and learned Gentleman told us that people can now have non-cash payments enforced on them, but that they must be agreed in contract between the two parties. Does he believe that those parties are equal? The employer will say, as employers do constantly, "I am re-employing you on new conditions. If you do not like them, get out." That is happning all over the country.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: That would be unfair dismissal.

Mr. Prescott: The Minister mutters something about unfair dismissal, but he knows that the Government have whittled away at people's rights to appear before a tribunal if there is a possible case for unfair dismissal. That applies especially to youngsters.

Mr. Clarke: Nothing in the Bill can take away from the existing contractual rights of a worker if his contract provides for payment in cash. That provision can be taken away from him only by negotiation. If there is a change in conditions of employment that makes it reasonable for him to refuse to take the change, he can claim unfair dismissal, if he had been there long enough.

Mr. Prescott: That is presumably a right that any new employee would not be able to claim because he will accept the job on the new terms, or not at all. The Minister says that the right is equal. The employer says, "You can work for me and I have a right to employ you." If the Minister had worked in industry, especially on the shop floor, or in the shipping industry, he would know that those rights are not equal at the place of work. If he had such experience, he would understand why people are so angry at his proposing to take away such rights.

Wrongful deduction of wages used to be pursuable in the county court, and the employer could be required to pay compensation. Now, however, there is some form of arbitration at a tribunal, and an employer can be required only to pay the amount that he has wrongfully deducted. More cannot be taken but, as we know from inspections in wages councils industries, many of the industries defy the legislation and therefore gain. There is a maximum fine of £400. The Bill does not change that, yet the industries have saved many thousands of pounds, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman has admitted in parliamentary answers.

There is another right to which the Minister did not address himself—the right to be paid what is called a fair wage. There might be arguments about how to assess a fair wage. There is a European social charter which says that even youngsters and apprentices are entitled to a fair wage. There is a judgment about how to arrive at a figure. Wages councils determine a fair wage for youngsters as a proportion of adult earnings but now, only market forces will determine fairness. It terrifies me to think what some Conservative Back Benchers would pay youngsters. The experience of the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) is well known.

Mr. Eastham: In Europe, to help determine a fair wage, they speak of a decency threshold. Does my hon. Friend agree that such words are not used in Britain any more?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The European charter defines the decency threshold at a rate of about £109 a week for an adult. If that is the European standard, the proportionate wage for youngsters here is extremely low. *[Interruption.]*

The Minister may mumble, but he is a member of a Government that have ratified conventions which aim to ensure fair wages. If there is a fundamental difference between us, it is that we do not believe that market forces will determine a fair wage. The result will be a wage below what legislation dictates. The Minister does not argue that the removal of legislation will allow wages to increase. Everybody knows that they will drop. There is considerable evidence to support that view.

I find it difficult to understand why the Government are so selective. They are vindictive when choosing who will suffer. Their justification is that there is a burden on industry. It is nothing to do with justice or rights, but relates to costs to the employer and unfair burdens on industry. The logical conclusion of their argument is that if employers can get free labour—it nearly is that with the youth training scheme — they will. The Minister might argue that that is a fair cost.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Trade union rates are paid on YTS.

Mr. Prescott: I hope that nobody will suggest that. It is not even the rate paid by the Labour Government in 1978 on similar schemes. I hope that we do not hear any argument about the fair or trade union rate, which would be much higher. The Bill is about dragooning those on YTS into slave labour type jobs in wages council industries.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Can the hon. Member make it clear once and for all whether the Labour Front Bench supports YTS or whether it believes that it is slave labour?

Mr. Prescott: It is amazing that the hon. Gentleman does not know that the Labour party supported the setting up of a youth training scheme and proposed a two-year scheme, with better terms of remuneration and far better quality of training. All of that has been spelt out. It was in our manifesto. Why did the hon. Gentleman not read it?

The judgment is that reducing wage costs will reduce employers' costs. If they pay less for labour, they will gain; we accept that. The argument is about whether that increases the number of jobs. We know that the young workers' scheme did not, as the Government are abandoning it. It ended up with the employer being

subsidised by the Government. It is no use the Minister shaking his head. That is why the Government are scrapping the scheme.

Since the fair wages resolution was denounced, there has been a forced reduction of about 20 per cent. in wages in hospitals and for public contracts. Holiday periods and conditions have also been reduced in the past three years. There has been a reduction in standards, in wages and in the number of jobs. In contracts negotiated by health authorities, fewer people are involved and at lower cost. Presumably the employer benefits. We are talking of rates of pay of less than £1 an hour. I cannot help observing that a barrister introduced the debate and another asked us what we think about YTS, but they are begging around for more money although they are on extremely high rates of pay. Moreover, they belong to a closed shop with a set of rules differing from that of any other closed shop, and no ballots either. Some of the Government's arguments would be more acceptable from those with experience of low pay.

Before I am challenged, I should say that I have worked in wages councils industries. I started in one—catering. I know of the weaknesses in negotiations and what it is like to be told to get out of accommodation because one does not want to work for £2 an hour, even in the days of wages councils. It is difficult to negotiate decent pay in such industries.

We should consider what is happening to the high paid. There was an article in *The Observer* of 10 February which talked of a City rush for golden handshakes. With regard to salaries—this is a serious point to be considered in a serious way—this is how the low-paid look at it: plenty of yap but no action.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman speaks of minimum wage legislation without saying where the Labour party stands on it. Has he forgotten that one of his better-known predecessors in the Labour party when she was in power considered minimum wage legislation and decided that she did not want to know any more about it because it would lead to the loss of so many jobs?

Mr. Prescott: Let me declare that we believe in introducing a national minimum wage, and we will argue the case when it has been proposed. Indeed, in a memorable comment regarding wages councils, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) said:

"If sweatshops are synonymous with wealthshops, I am all in favour of this country becoming a wealthshop where by the sweat of our brow, we can once again become the workshop of the world."—[*Official Report*, 26 March 1985; Vol. 76, c. 404.]

That is the language of the 19th century, so I hope I will hear less from the Conservatives about a minimum wage.

What we find equally offensive are the excessive amounts of money — I believe that even the Prime Minister referred to this — which are currently being made in the City, whereby eight dealers in one share dealing get £280,000 a year. That is more in one hour than most people in wage councils get in a week. I happen to think that that is not fair. I do not know what Conservative Members think.

I find it particularly offensive when I hear people such as the CBI pushing for this kind of legislation. Was it Sir Terence Beckett who talked about nowt for nowt? That is from chief executives and directors whose pay in the last two years has gone through the roof with a massive increase in profits of something like 45 per cent. in real terms between 1981 and 1984—over £20 billion—and an increase in value per unit of production in profitability or as a proportion of the gross national product. This is against real pay, which has gone up 2 per cent.

We hear the CBI talking about nowt for nowt and calling on the Government to do something about changing the wage relationship. I recall a CBI statement calling for changes which said:

"The CBI recognises there may be concern about those on low pay. It argues that this concern, where legitimate, should be met through the social security system and not through pay. An employer can only pay the rate for the job whereas individuals' needs vary with their circumstances."

The chief executives who constitute the CBI have done very well in the last few years. The massive increase in profits, rather than going to create jobs, is a disinvestment in the economy. All that money has gone into the pay and bonus payments of chief executives in industry or, indeed, into property investment in New York. Where it has clearly not gone is into re-equipping industry to bring about the kind of productivity that results in high wages.

There has been no action by Government. The only Government action we have seen is when they came to the House in July 1985 and argued that there was justification for a top salaries review whereby, over a period, civil servants on £60,000 a year, judges and Army officers would receive something like a 17 per cent. increase. Where were the claims then about a market rate? All we heard from the Government then was that we must pay a fair wage to those people, comparable to what they would earn in similar jobs in private industry. The Minister shakes his head, but it is a matter of record—this can be seen in answers by the Prime Minister and by others —that private industry is doing very well, thank you, out of the bonuses given by Government by way of tax reductions.

The greatest claim made for the legislation is that it will create new jobs—that is, that less pay means more jobs. Again, we pushed the Minister for the evidence. The former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, when he appeared before the Select Committee on Employment on 6 March 1985, was asked what evidence he had to show that a reduction in wages led to more jobs. He was asked:

"What effect has it had on wages and what effect has it had on employment, is there anything hard on that?".

The right hon. Gentleman replied: "No." He was asked:

"Would it be possible to find out?"

He replied:

"No. I do not think so."

Even before the Select Committe, the Department gave no evidence.

Reference has been made to the report by the Department on the clothing industry, an industry in which wages have fallen 20 per cent. for men and 13 per cent. for women, with increasing unemployment levels. The department of applied economics in an analysis of the Government's research said:

"The key assumptions made by the Department were false . . . The Department's analysis was inadequate . . . Using the figures the Department should have used, the Department's cost minimising model of the industry shows that, while the rise in male minimum rates produced a small fall in employment, the far larger rise in female minimum rates increased employment by a greater percentage."

That is the very opposite conclusion from that reached by the Government.

Similar research was done into the retail industry by Wilkinson at Cambridge, and he came to a conclusion

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opposite to that put out publicly by the Department. He was so annoyed at the wrongful use of his evidence that he issued a press release denouncing the Department for wrongful use of the research which it had commissioned. Why should we believe what the Minister tells us when the Government abuse such research?

The basic proposition put forward by the Chancellor was that a 1 per cent. fall in the wage rates leads to an increase of 150,000 jobs. Warwick university looked at the Treasury model and tried to determine how that conclusion had been reached. It found that the jobs created by a 1 per cent. fall totalled 15,000. Of the evidence, it said:

"The estimates that we obtain reveal a much smaller employment response than that predicted by the Chancellor. Part of the difference is attributable to revisions in the Treasury model".

The Government fixed and fiddled the Treasury model, just as they do the unemployment figures, and then bring it forward as evidence of justification for the case.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am following the hon. Gentleman carefully to see where his argument is taking him. Is he asserting on behalf of the Labour party all over again that there is no connection between the level of pay and the level of employment? He seems to have broadened his argument. Is that once again the basis upon which the Labour party is going to form policy?

Mr. Prescott: The Labour party readily accepts that, if minimum wages were increased 100 per cent., there may be some effects on employment. It is the consequence of legislation on low pay and jobs that we need to see justified. The range of possibilities of what would happen if one got rid of the wages councils goes from 8,000 over five years to the finding of mad Professor Minford of Liverpool, who talks about 400,000 jobs coming from the change. If the Minister would give an indication of the number of jobs he thinks are likely to be created by the legislation, we would listen with some seriousness, but he has given no such indication. The evidence which we have had in considering the problem objectively suggests that in some cases an increase in rates leads to an increase in employment.

Mr. Nellist: If the Minister is correct in his argument that high wages lead to high unemployment, will my hon. Friend accept from me that the lowest unemployment in the world would be in India and the highest in Sweden? It is investment in manufacturing industry which determines productivity, not the level of wages of workers.

Mr. Prescott: That leads me to the point that the cost to the business man may be a wage in one sense, but what about the non-wage cost? It may be an increase in investment which we have failed to get, but industry will have to carry other costs.

Under the Bill an employer will have to carry the extra cost of redundancy if he has fewer than 10 employees. Already employers are complaining. An employer may have to carry more labour than he needs because he cannot afford to make anyone redundant.

In the last few years there has also been an increase in national insurance contributions. The Government have complained about Labour Governments increasing national insurance payments. Since 1978 the national insurance contributions paid by employers have risen by 6 per cent. but the greater increase of 52 per cent., has fallen on employees. So not only does the employee carry the greater burden of the cost, but he will have to face the possibility of a reduction in his wage.

The real reason for the Bill can be seen in the fears about its consequences. The Labour party and the TUC have produced documents about the reform of wages councils. Of course we have been calling for their reform, but the real reason for the Bill is to increase the employment of youngsters. The best evidence of that is the Cabinet papers of 1982, which I have quoted before, in which the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) was arguing against the proposition that control of youngsters' pay should be removed from wages councils. He gave certain evidence to the Cabinet; he said that the proposal to exclude young persons and part-time workers was a

"suggestion that usually comes from small shopkeepers."

That is a very relevant point. Later, he said:

"there is unlikely to be any very significant scope generally for actually paying these categories less and increasing job opportunities thereby."

He felt that if that were done it would be largely at the expense of the jobs of full-time adult breadwinners. I do not think any of my hon. Friends would disagree with those conclusions. He added:

"Such substitutions would involve the higher economic costs of adult unemployment."

That is precisely the point we make. He also said:

"the same inducement would be likely to lead to their dismissal on reaching adult age."

That was the conclusion of the right hon. Member for Waveney in recommending to the Cabinet that it should not take such action. He also concluded

"that the exclusion of young persons and part-time workers fom the scope of wages councils would be unlikely to lead to more than a very marginal increase in job opportunities for these categories and largely at the expense of fulltime adult jobs. I am in no doubt that serious political and legislative difficulties of such a course would outweigh any conceivable benefits".

That was all thrown out by the caring capitalist, the right hon. Member for Chingford.

There are other reports to which I do not have time to refer. The Auld report thought that wages councils were necessary to protect shop workers if Sunday opening was granted. The Select Committee on Employment made it clear that, although there might be reform it could lead to a significant substitution of adult employees by youngsters.

Let the House judge me by the prediction that the legislation is to prepare the way for the removal of adult workers, mainly women, earning £40 and £50 per week and their replacement by YTS youngsters on £27 a week. The beneficial effect for the Government will be a reduction in the unemployment figures because youngsters are recorded as unemployed but most of the women do not pay national insurance contributions and will not be registered as claiming unemployment benefit. It will be yet another massaging of the unemployment figures.

We have heard Ministers reading press releases about people's rights. The position of employers is being strengthened at the expense of employees. Even the limit of 10 per cent. on deductions from the wages of garage forecourt employees will not be 10 per cent. of the gross wage but 15 per cent. of the net wage, which might be as much as £6 for someone earning £40 per week. Have

Ministers thought of the implications of such a deduction on employers who are gung-ho at the moment about what they can do to employees?

We hear great rhetoric about the rights of individuals. An employee should have the right to say that he wants his money in cash because he cannot go to the bank or cannot manage his affairs without paying bank charges. Why can the individual not exercise his right to receive his wages in cash?

We shall also be challenging the removal of the employee's right to premium paid overtime. The Bill is preparing for the abolition of overtime in shops so that that industry will be ready for Sunday opening. I am glad to see the Minister nodding. Under shops legislation, if someone works on Sunday he gets a premium payment even if he has not worked all week. Under the Bill the Minister will lay down that someone must work 30 or 40 hours a week before getting overtime. That means that Sunday work will be given to youngsters and part-timers and people who work in shops will not get the premium payments that they expect.

The Bill does not extend rights or employment opportunities. It is designed to switch the balance of advantage to the employer at the expense of those least able to afford it. The purpose is to bring down the unemployment figures. The Bill will impose 19th-century conditions on 20th-century Britain, with one law for the wealthy and another for the poor employees. It particularly singles out women and young people, those on less than £40 per week, as the obstacles to the return to full employment and prosperity.

Labour will repeal the legislation without hesitation and will put Britain back among civilised nations, where we shall observe international standards and at the same time refuse to place the greatest burden on those least able to bear it.

5.27 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): In an earlier debate I argued at length why I believe wages councils should be reformed, not abolished. Therefore, I am pleased that the Government, having consulted widely, have decided to reform rather than abolish wages councils. I do not intend to repeat the arguments that I advanced previously as to why reform, not abolition should take place, but I am pleased that the Government, having listened, have decided on reform in ways advocated by myself and other hon. Members.

Before coming to the specific reforms that the Government have decided to introduce, there is one misconception which it is important to dismiss. The suggestion that wages councils and minimum pay levels are necessary to tackle poverty must be cleared out of the way. There is very little correlation between low pay and poverty. The Royal Commission on the distribution of income and wealth, the Diamond commission, initiated research by Richard Layard. Professor Layard has been described by *The Sunday Times* as a leading Government critic. The Royal Commission concluded:

"Of workers in the bottom 10 per cent. of income relative to supplementary benefit only one fifth were in the bottom 10 per cent. of hourly earnings. The reason is that the poorest workers are men with large families, many of whom earn a reasonably high wage, while most of those on the lowest pay are married women where earnings ensure that the family are not among the poorest. . . . a substantial proportion of low paid employees are not in poor households, and a substantial proportion of the poor are not low paid."

To put it briefly, the problems of the poor are not so much low pay as no pay. Another misconception——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood) *rose*——

Mr. Baldry: With respect, there is much that I want to say.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Give way.

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way at the behest of my hon. Friend.

Ms. Clare Short: We would all agree that not all of the poor in Britain are low-paid workers, but the opposite does not apply. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that of low-paid workers in Britain, those covered by wages councils are the lowest paid? Of course, 2 million out of the 2·75 million are women, and of those one in four is either a single head of household or has no other income to the household. The hon. Gentleman cannot assume that low-paid women are not in families living in poverty.

Mr. Baldry: I reiterate that poverty is as much the consequence of no pay as low pay. For example, pensioners and single parent families with no pay are the group with the highest incidence of poverty.

Another misconception which needs to be dismissed is the suggestion that somehow pay rates and levels of employment have no relationship. Ten years ago the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said:

"the number of people who have a job will depend directly on the level of pay received by those in work." — [*Official Report*, 6 April 1976; Vol. 909, c. 271.]

That was said by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. I should have thought that it would be common sense to everyone in the House that wages which are not earned by productivity can only cause greater inflation and result in the loss of jobs.

Mr. Eastham: The hon. Gentleman referred to a statement which was made 10 years ago. Does he believe that when that statement was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) he was suggesting that the lowest paid should have even less money proportionately than those on high pay? It may be that he was alluding to something else.

Mr. Baldry: The right hon. Member for Leeds, East was clearly saying that pay levels and the number of jobs have a direct correlation. If the Labour party has not learnt that in 10 years, that is its fault and it is a great pity.

I submit that the Bill introduces two sensible reforms. The first is by limiting the wages councils' ability to set a single minimum rate and a single overtime rate. Within the rhetoric of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) one got the impression that the Government were abolishing wages councils. They are not. All that the Government are seeking to do for adults is to remove some of the over-complications and complexities of the wages councils at the present time.

The Department of Employment consultative paper correctly stated that, at present,

"the wages orders sometimes run to 30 pages in length and apply to many different grades or categories or worker; their provisions are frequently difficult for both employers and employees to understand, with the result that many of the underpayments which occur arise from misinterpretation rather than wilful disregard of legal requirements; the rigidities of the orders inhibit employers in the development of sensible wage structures and systems of remuneration more appropriate to their businesses; the law permits the issue of orders with retrospective application

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which can cause real problems, particularly for smaller employers who can be faced with increased expenditure which they had not forseen. All these burdens can inhibit the growth of small businesses in the wages council trades and thus damage employment."

Indeed, the complexity of the present wages orders issued by wages councils pose a particular problem for small businesses. For example, one order is 34 pages long and specifies 144 different rates. One can produce many examples of complexity. One can produce a page 4 ft by 2 ft which has to be pinned up——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman is getting out of order. He should not be displaying wages council orders.

Mr. Baldry: Perhaps I should refer to — *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that it causes consternation to the Labour party that the size of the sack and bag wages council order——

Miss Betty Boothroyd (West Bromwich, West): I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it does not cause us dismay. However, whatever is shown in the House has to be interpreted in *Hansard*. What the hon. Gentleman has before him cannot be interpreted in *Hansard*.

Mr. Baldry: The admission that the wages council orders are beyond interpretation in *Hansard* makes my point.

Perhaps I can quote briefly from two wages orders which apply to many people. The first is the hairdressing undertakings wages council order. Many people work as hairdressers. An employer of hairdressers has to consider no fewer than 14 categories of employee and 12 different categories of rates of pay. I should not have thought that if one walked into a high street hairdresser one would imagine that the employer, before employing someone, would have to consider whether he or she was employing an apprentice, cashier, clerical assistant, sales assistant, chargehand, clerk, receptionist, college-trained student, manager or manageress, manicurist, operative hairdresser, prospective apprentice, senior apprentice or shampooist. For each of those there may be a different rate of pay and for each of those one would have to consider whether a clerk or a receptionist means

"a worker who is wholly or mainly engaged in one or more of the following activities — clerical work which includes responsibility for maintaining ledgers or wages books or preparing financial accounts of a hairdressing undertaking or of a branch or department thereof; receiving customers; arranging customers' appointments."

Mr. Couchman: Will my hon. Friend concede that to a small employer the arrival of the wages inspector is a matter for considerable concern, because the great confusion and complexity of the various orders means that many small employers have great difficulty working out precisely what the pay and conditions of their employees should be?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East gave the impression that there was substantial under-payment under wages councils orders. In fact, compliance with wages councils orders is generally high. When pay was checked in 1983, 93 per cent. of workers were found to have been paid correctly. However, a substantial proportion of the under-payment which does occur is doubtless due to the complexity of the orders. I submit that there is no possible advantage to employees of having a system whereby their employers are confronted with orders as complex as many of the present wages council orders. I find it amazing that the Labour party should seek to protect a system which is so complex and which can lead to employers finding themselves constantly confused and working against the benefit of employees because under-payment is often due to the fact that it is almost impossible for employers to determine the correct rate.

Mr. Prescott: Is the hon. Gentleman putting forward the argument that as 93·7 per cent. actually pay the rates, the other 6 per cent. who do not are employers who do not understand the legislation?

Mr. Baldry: Even the Low Pay Unit has to acknowledge that

"some members of the Inspectorate themselves . . . argue that the complexity of the orders means that, in some cases, underpayment . . . is genuinely due to employers' ignorance . . . It is not surprising that employers complain of ignorance or that technical breaches occur."

That was the evidence of the Low Pay Unit in its paper "Who Needs Wages Councils?" Therefore, even the Low Pay Unit concedes that the complexity of the present wages council orders leads to under-payment.

Mr. Prescott: Ninety-five per cent.?

Mr. Baldry: No. Ninety-five per cent. appears to comply with the wages council orders.

Mr. Prescott: That is only because they know what to comply with.

Mr. Baldry: Under-payment is often due to the complexity of the wages structure. I am surprised that Labour Members do not wish wages councils orders to be made simpler for the benefit of both employee and employer to ensure minimum standards below which no employee can fall and so that everyone can understand clearly and precisely what he is doing. That would give much more freedom to employees and employers properly to negotiate the wages and conditions that they want. In that way 12 or 14 rigid categories would not be imposed on a hairdressing establishment by an outside body. The hairdresser and his staff would be free to determine for themselves how employees should be remunerated, with the protection of a wage level below which no one could fall.

The second sensible reform that the Bill will produce is that of removing those under 21 years from the scope of wages councils. Wages council rates have almost certainly created barriers to employment by setting payments at too high a level for those under 21. The average minimum rate for young people under wages council cover is significantly higher relative to adult rates than minimum rates under national collective agreements. No fewer than 22 of the 26 wages councils pay 16-year-olds a higher proportion of the adult rate than the average proportion paid to that age group under national agreements. In some instances the youth minimum rate set by wages councils is exceptionally high. That must be set against a background where starting pay for school leavers in Britian averages 60 per cent. of adult rates, while in the rest of Europe the average is below 20 per cent.

The hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East did not deal with the point that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet). My

hon. Friend asked why other countries which comply with the ILO convention, such as West Germany, pay rates to young people that are significantly lower than those paid in Britain. Youth wages as a proportion of adult wages are higher in the United Kingdom than in any other Western country, and the reason for that is simple.

For far too long there has been a conspiracy within parts of the trade union movement to keep youth wages high and the result has been to keep young people out of jobs. Given the high proportion of employees who are on the minimum rate and the high level of youth earnings relative to adult earnings, it is easy to conclude that wages councils have reduced the employment opportunities for young people and that they continue to do so. There is a clear case for removing young people from the provisions of wages councils as such a move would help to price young people back into work.

Apprentices' pay cuts can increase the chances of work. A notable deal, which has already been referred to, is the one which took place between unions and employers in the electrical contracting industry. Cutting the wages of new apprentices has given thousands more young people a chance to learn a craft. The arrangement was negotiated with the relevant trade unions. The number of apprentices in that industry has increased from 850 a year a few years ago to more than 3,200 in 1984. I should have thought that the Labour party would applaud increases in opportunities for young people that enable them to gain experience, work and training, which is what the apprenticeship agreement has produced. The employers and the unions agreed that the pay for apprentices was too high, and they acted accordingly, with the direct result that the number of apprentices has trebled.

Instead of the old fixed four-year apprenticeship terms, trainees are now tested on their attainment and can qualify considerably earlier. It is sad that this example has not been followed in other sectors of industry. Negotiations broke down within the engineering industry over one union's insistence that apprentices should enjoy a pay increase in line with that for adult workers. When one engineering company observed that it had no apprentices, the union replied that it wanted to keep rates high for young people for when the company took on apprentices in future. The reality is that if trade unions insist on youth rates remaining nearly as high as those for adults, few apprentices will be taken on. It is only by having a sensible approach to youth pay, in the same way as our continental competitors, that we shall see more young people getting into work, training and apprenticeships. For far too long there has been a conspiracy on the part of some sections of the trade union movement to keep young people out of work by keeping youth rates in an artificially high level.

In West Germany, apprentices earn between 15 and 25 per cent. of the adult wage; in Britain they earn between 50 and 60 per cent. It must be realised that the level of youth wage rates relative to the rates of other competing groups of workers is important. In September 1985, the OECD, in its "Employment Outlook", reported as follows:

"Increases in relative youth wages for other than market reasons and downward rigidity in youth wages relative to those of adults have resulted in job losses for young people in some member countries."

Is that what the Labour party wants? Does it want job losses to ensue for young people? High youth wages choke off training opportunities and reduce employment opportunities for young people. It is not surprising that employers are unwilling to employ youngsters at rates comparable to those paid to adults. If an employer has to make a choice between taking on an adult or a young person at almost the same rates, he will take on the adult. There is no incentive for an employer to recruit and provide young people with training.

The provisions within the Bill are not the draconian changes that the Labour party would have us believe. They are sensible reforms which strike the right balance between guaranteeing protection for adults in ensuring that there is a wage level below which they cannot fall and helping in the creation of new jobs. Those reforms will lead to a more sensible and rational approach to wage negotiations in the longer term and to the creation of new jobs. If so, they are well worth supporting. I support the Bill and the measures that it seeks to enact.

5.48 pm

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"That this House declines to give a Second Reading to a Wages Bill almost wholly negative in its provisions which, while removing all statutory protection for young employees, do nothing to reduce youth unemployment and nothing to tackle the serious current problems of poverty wages amongst unavoidably unorganised workers, which remove the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service from Wages Council procedure, and which reduce United Kingdom protection of low-paid workers below the level maintained in most European Economic Community countries and in the United States of America."

The parts of the Bill that deal with the repeal of the Truck Acts and the ending of redundancy rebates for most employers are important, but they can be left to debate in Committee and on Report. Therefore, I shall concentrate my remarks, which will be as brief as I can contrive while covering the necessary ground, to the proposed wages council changes.

In a sense, some modest note of congratulation is due to the Government for resisting the worst of their slogan mongers and thus not abolishing the wages councils, which would have created fearful tasks for a progressive Government in due course. However, the Bill so cripples and confines the wages councils as to make it close to an abolition measure. Our amendment stresses that it is strange that the Government, who pride themselves on facing modern conditions and problems in new ways, should produce a Bill which is almost entirely negative.

I accept that there is need for reform. There is urgent need for reforming what will be the policing of this measure. Among other things, Parliament's authority suffers when legislation is deliberately under-policed and sections of society are virtually given the go-ahead to flout what Parliament has enacted, as has happened with lack of wages orders enforcement.

The operation of the wages councils also needs to be reformed. During the Liberal campaign in the 1970s against low wages I was involved with the appalling petrification of the lace finishing wages council. It had been allowed to petrify and become completely inoperative mainly because the employers, sometimes aided by the Government, had implied to the lace workers, mainly in Nottingham, that pay increases would threaten their job security. In the event, that turned out to be wholly untrue. Eventually we managed to bring back to life the lace finishing wages council, to the benefit of that industry. Reform was needed, because there was no

[Mr. Richard Wainwright]

machinery to compel the wages council to do its job. If all sides of the council membership decided to be inactive and paralysed, the needs of the workers counted for nothing.

We should also beware when simplification is referred to as reform. The sack and bag employers may be unduly harassed by the complexity of the regulations in their industry. However, in an industry that employs expert personnel managers—for example, the catering industry—a very sharp Government draftsman is needed to ensure that the orders are proof against highly expert manipulation. Nobody can say that the catering industry——

Mr. Couchman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wainwright: I shall give way in a moment.

Nobody can say that in recent years the catering industry in this country has been repressed, that catering enterprise has been smothered and that new developments have been hindered by wages regulation. I now give way.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Is he aware that very large sections of the catering, hotel and particularly public house trade are in the hands of very small business men who do not employ skilled personnel managers to take part in wage negotiations for the industry?

Mr. Wainwright: Wise hoteliers belong, in my experience, to a highly efficient and admirable trade association that rightly provides them with expert guidance. It would be foolish of the Government so to streamline that set of regulations as to be made an ass of by the experts who are engaged to help that admirable industry.

Ms. Clare Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wainwright: Yes, but perhaps for the last time.

Ms. Short: Income Data Services carried out a study of the retailing and the licensed and hotel trade to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It covered 2 million out of the 2·75 million workers who are protected by wages councils and said that they were dominated by large, not to say giant, firms. If the workplace is small, that does not mean that they are not run by very large employers who are easily able to cope with the details of wages council orders.

Mr. Wainwright: I do not suggest that the smaller units in the catering industry must therefore be ignored; far from it. Fortunately, they are protected by admirable trade associations. However, the Bill is depressingly negative in that it ignores more recent forms of exploitation and quite unjustifiable low rates of pay. The Paymaster General told us that the scene has changed since the time of King William IV and since 1909 when, under Winston Churchill, wages councils were introduced by a glorious Government. However, he failed to take his own medicine and recognise that there are many relatively new industries in which pay and conditions are disgraceful and where the opportunity for workers to be organised into trade unions is very small because of the nature of the job.

For example, I am sure that many meritorious companies are sensible enough to pay their security guards well, for which they receive good service; but some security guards are very badly paid by less scrupulous employers. They are almost impossible to unionise because of the isolated nature of their work. Another example is the launderette, as distinct from the laundry which is covered by a wages council. There are some good employers in launderettes, but others pay very meagre wages.

Contract cleaning has also experienced a great boom because of the absurd numbers game with the Civil Service reductions. The number of people directly employed in cleaning has been reduced. They were sacked from Government employment, but in many cases they were re-engaged by a contract cleaning company the following Monday, often at a lower wage. Furthermore, many branches of the leisure industries, apart from catering, pay very poor wages for the services which their employees give, in all weathers.

Why are these industries not covered? Why do the Government not adopt a new approach to try to alleviate poverty of this kind? The Treasury Bench would do well to take to heart the apposite words of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) who at Blackpool last weekend spoke to an, apparently, largely enthusiastic audience about the need for society to create the wealth with which to improve living standards. He said that it is wrong to

"blame the weak when the strong fail"

and

"it is not the foot soldiers who lose wars."

Those words rang in my ears this afternoon when it was suggested that unemployment is caused by the activities of wages councils. It is wrong to blame the foot soldiers——

Mr. Thurnham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wainwright: No, I have given way generously until now.

I regret that the Bill contains no provision for the establishment of new wages councils. Furthermore, a highly civilised part of the Wages Councils Act 1979 is to be abolished. It provides that if employers or employees' representatives propose an extension of the wage fixing arrangements, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service can be brought in—ACAS is cited time and again in the 1979 Act—to advise the Secretary of State. To remove the role of ACAS seems to be short sighted.

The Bill will limit the activities of those wages councils that are allowed to survive only to the setting of a single minimum hourly rate in respect of basic hours and also a single overtime rate. It is difficult to imagine anything more crude and impracticable that could be applied in the complex circumstances of most wage fixing.

I ask the Minister for Employment or the Under-Secretary of State for Employment who is to wind up the debate, to say how the Government expect to persuade independent people of experience and reputation—assuming that it is in the Government's mind to continue to have independent people on the wages councils—to accept such a crude, useless and futile task as setting only one nationwide rate for basic hours and only one overtime rate, whether it is an overtime rate for Sundays or an overtime rate for an extra half an hour at the end of the day. It can be compared with a hospital authority advertising for a consultant surgeon but adding, "The only implements available are one carving knife and one pair of scissors."

The system will fall into disrepute because of the absurd task to which the Government have chosen to limit wages councils.

As for the need for a much wider range of regional wage rates, the Government have ignored entirely the two nations that their seven years in office have created. The two different economies, as the Under-Secretary of State knows, representing as he does a relatively stricken and devastated part of the country compared with most parts of the west London area, call out for different minimum rates.

It is absurd to suggest, as clause 14(5)*(a)* does, that the wages councils should be obliged to consider employment and wages only in the more distressed parts of the United Kingdom. The wages councils should be obliged to consider prevailing wages rates, and living costs in all the different travel-to-work areas, thus taking account of reginal variations. *[Interruption.]* It is no good Conservative Members showing their ignorance of conditions in other parts of Britain by being amused. If they lived in the part of Britain in which I have worked and which I know well, they would realise that there is an enormous gulf between what is regarded as tolerable pay in parts of Yorkshire and what is regarded as tolerable pay in the extremely expensive areas of west London and parts of the home counties. The whole matter should be subject to greater scientific regional examination instead of being reduced to a mere two wage rates nationwide.

I come to the central question which has rightly occupied so much of the debate—workers under 21. A Liberal Member is entitled to say something about this because, for 20 years, we have shown that we are well aware of the appalling contribution that excessive pay increases make to unemployment. At a time when Members of the Conservative party were conspiring with the future leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), to destroy Mr. Harold Wilson's incomes policy, we insisted, as we have always done since then, that an incomes policy is an essential requirement of full employment. We need no lectures on the dangers of certain people's pay levels creating unemployment, but it is hypocrisy to suggest that provisions for young people which require a second-year apprentice hairdresser to receive £34 gross in return for a 40-hour week are doing young people out of valued employment.

The Conservatives when in opposition were loud in their complaint that, in talking about pay, it is no good talking about percentages — the absolute amount of money is what matters. All the elaborate arguments that in Britain, in certain cases, a higher proportion of adult pay for young people is the legal minimum than in other countries are beside the point in the light of the meagre amount which that arithmetic produces. A higher proportion of pathetically small minimum pay cannot be regarded as a menace.

The alliance believes that this crippling of wages councils by the exclusion of young workers will have such a destabilising effect on the competition between small firms that the net number of new jobs available for young people is likely to be less rather than more. Certainly, the number will not be significantly increased.

The CBI is not enthusiastic about the removal of young people from the scope of the Bill. If some employers are allowed to exploit unknowing young people to the hilt, unfair competition will damage the overall prospects for youth employment by closing down good firms.

I agree that an age trap has been created. Many people will be sacked or discouraged from continuing their employment when they reach the dangerous age of 21 when they will be entitled to some modest protection. West Yorkshire, part of which I represent and where I have always lived in peace time, has the worst low pay record of all the big urban regions, even though there are a number of well-paid occupations and common-sense industrial relations in the area.

Mr. Prescott: Nowt for nowt.

Mr. Wainwright: "Nowt for nowt" was the appropriate dialect to which Sir Terence Beckett resorted in his rather unfortunate remark.

Far away from Westminster there are areas where low pay is a long-standing curse and where young people live with the culture of the work ethic. They live in non-conformist areas where there is still a faint stigma attached to vigorous and able-bodied young people who do not get a job. The idea that youngsters can be exploited without hindrance is repugnant to people of common sense, no matter which way they vote in elections.

In Yorkshire and Humberside as a whole, more than 290,000 people, many of them women and many others from ethnic minorities, have some protection — not much — with the existing wages councils structure. Although the system could be simplified and streamlined, I do not believe that it should be removed.

Let us compare Britain with the rest of the industrial world, as we must always do. The International Labour Organisation reported in 1984 that almost all industrial countries now operate minimum wages systems and that, to its knowledge, none exclude young workers. Those who talk about the United States as a paradise of deregulation and think that its magnificant job creation record is due largely to the unshackling of enterprise and letting employers rip, fail to realise that, for at least the past 20 years, there has been nationwide minimum wage regulation in the USA. My evidence shows that this is widely observed and accepted as part of the equipment of a civilised nation.

In view of all these considerations, I hope that the amendment will receive the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The alliance will vote against the Second Reading.

6.7 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I listened carefully to the Opposition and heard nothing to make me feel that I should alter the opinion that I held when I was a member of the Select Committee that looked into wages councils and when I dissented from the majority report that wages councils should be continued. Wages councils are nothing but a deterrent to employment. When unemployment is so high, I can see no justification for keeping them.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment on bringing forward this welcome legislation, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment—the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier)—on his support. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) is in the

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

Chamber, because I think that he was not able to be with us last June for the debate on wages councils. I look forward to hearing his contribution.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) referred to foot soldiers not losing wars. I point out that foot soldiers do not go on strike or have recourse to wages councils and disputes during a war. It is because the foot soldiers have been so affected by attempts to protect them from market forces that we have lost so many wars. Despite the Labour party's wish that market forces should be put on one side, the result is unemployment.

The Bill is a welcome contribution to measures to remove all restrictions on certain employment up to the age of 21. I hope that, when the Bill is considered in more detail and is put into practice, the Minister will consider whether it is needed in particular industries. It contains no provision that implies that wages councils should be continued. The hon. Member for Colne Valley seems to think that we need new wages councils for new industries, but I see no need for them. New industries have come forward without wages councils, and I believe that such interference would be the last thing they would want.

What will happen once workers reach the age of 21? If they lose their job at that age, perhaps they should be given a box of ministerial fudge to make up for the way in which the Bill attempts to strike a compromise. That compromise is unnecessary, and may exist only in words, because the Bill will make wages councils toothless by limiting them to such a degree that they will not work. We have already heard how many wages councils have fallen by the wayside, but I am satisfied that they will continue to fall by the wayside, even with the provisions of the Bill.

I remind right hon. and hon. Members of what the studies have shown. The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has an early-day motion calling attention to the garment industry. I ask him to read carefully the Department of Employment's report on the garment industry, which showed that between 1954 and 1971 about 50,000 jobs were lost. I do not see any evidence to refute that argument, and that situation has been repeated in other industries.

The most surprising thing about the debate is the Labour party's inability to come forward with its proposals for minimum wage legislation. I asked the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) what the Labour party was doing, and he said that it was still considering the matter. Labour Members were still considering it when we debated the matter in June. As usual the Labour party is living in the past.

When the matter was considered in 1969, a report by the Department of Employment——

Ms. Clare Short: That was in the past.

Mr. Thurnham: We are living in the past. The report was produced in 1969 and showed that a minimum wage law would create considerable unemployment, particularly in areas of great difficulty, such as Northern Ireland. Why does the Labour party continue to talk about minimum wage legislation, which is the logical progression of any wages councils legislation, and about applying it to every industry but not come forward with proposals for it? I think that it is because it would lead to job losses. Why press for it in certain industries if a case cannot be made for it in all industries?

We have already had some reference by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) to the agreement between the electrical contracting industry and the electricians union. The House and the country can be greatly pleased by the actions of the electricians union in helping to keep the freedom of the press. We can congratulate the electricians union. I am proud to play a part in the electrical industry, and we can congratulate the union on an agreement for apprentices which reduced the pay from £41·63 to £27·88 per week, which had the effect of increasing the number of apprentices recruited into that industry from 850 in 1982 to 3,210 in 1984.

Ms. Clare Short: The agreement was about taking numbers of YTS trainees into the electrical industry, so the Government were paying their wages. I am sure that many jobs could be generated if the Government would pay out large sums in wages. That tells us nothing about the general question of cutting youth wages to generate jobs.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Lady has just made the point that we want to hear. She said that many more jobs could be generated if employers did not have to bear the full cost of the wages. That is exactly our argument, and it is applicable above all to those who are in need of training.

I started work on £4 5s a week, and yesterday I was reminded by the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) that he started work on 12s a week. In those days people were not deterred from starting work and learning a trade by the wages, and employers were not deterred from taking them on by wages which were too high.

We have also heard a great deal of talk from the Opposition about the effect of market forces in creating high wages. Surely this is evidence of the fact that we should encourage market forces to allow high wages, instead of trying to deter them. To judge from the way in which the Opposition are going on, anyone would think that we needed a wages council for the City. Perhaps some poor people in the City cannot earn as much as some others. It is surprising that I have heard nothing from the Opposition about asking for a wages council for the City. It would seem that it is only some people about whom they are worried.

I regret that I cannot attend the whole debate. This is because the annual meeting of the electrical contracting industry is being held today and I have undertaken to attend it. I shall do so with great pride, in the knowledge that that industry has set an example and given encouragement to all others. I wish the Bill every success.

6.15 pm

Miss Betty Boothroyd (West Bromwich, West): The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) has done a good deal of work on the operation of wages councils. I have tried to wade through this Bill before us, and I find it to be a pernicious piece of legislation. As the Paymaster General indicated in introducing it to the House, it received most notoriety for its disgraceful proposals for the reform and abolition of wages councils. I hope to deal with those proposals in a moment, but first I should like to comment on the wholly inadequate proposals in part I of the Bill.

As I understand it, part I repeals 11 Acts of Parliament, and sections from a further four items of protective employment legislation. It is very far-reaching indeed. I do not think that we can ignore part I of the Bill.

Reference has been made to the Truck Acts. Of course the Truck Acts are very old. They protected the rights of working people. One of the things that they did was to stop payment in kind for work done. They said that money had to be the reward for labour that had been exerted. Working people had a choice: they could be paid in cash, by cheque or by some other means. One effect of the repeal of the various Truck Acts and Payment of Wages Acts is that it will put the clock back. The move towards cashless pay will be encouraged, and manual workers will no longer have the long-established right to be paid in cash. That was confirmed this afternoon by the Paymaster General, in response to an intervention, when he said that any manual worker taking up a job after this Bill becomes an Act will no longer have the choice. The choice will be that of the employer, and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made much of that, and rightly so, in his speech. It is an erosion of the individual's rights, and a most retrograde step.

Equally important, as a corollary to this, the statutory protection offered by the Truck Act 1896 against an employer making deductions from wages has also disappeared. I think many hon. Members in all parts of the House will be familiar with individual cases which have been brought to them. Law centres have considerable experience of this, especially in relation to petrol station cashiers who face harsh deductions. The *Industrial Law Journal* gave the example of a cashier who worked 40 hours a week for £65, and who took home £5·60 at the end of the week after deductions because errors were deducted from earnings. Part I repeals the protection under the Truck Acts and does not replace it with statutory regulations acceptable to us.

That is hardly surprising, because the Government show little respect for employment protection legislation. The Bill falls short of providing the protection necessary in many ways. First, there is no justification for abolishing the criminal sanction against employers which is at present contained in the Truck Acts. When arbitrary deductions from wages cease to be a criminal offence, it is likely that more employers will make them. I recognise that clause 5 allows for the repayment of deductions to an employee, but only after that employee has gone to an industrial tribunal and obtained a favourable decision that the deduction was unlawful. That cannot be right. Clause 5 is too woolly and is by no means an adequate safeguard, and I ask the Minister to be more specific when he replies.

Secondly, the Bill does not provide protection for workers who are dismissed and who apply to an industrial tribunal on the ground that unlawful deductions have been made. In my view, any employee dismissed in such circumstances should be able to bring a claim for unfair dismissal without the need to have been in that employment for two years. There is a huge void here, and the Minister must explain it fully when he replies.

Third, in relation to clause 1, it is insufficient to provide for the deductions from wages to be made through a written term of contract. Contracts of employment which contain such terms may have been signed many years previously, and may not be in precise language. The employee may have forgotten agreeing to the contract, and may be genuinely unaware of its provisions and what it means. The least that we can accept is that the Bill should contain provisions to enable employees who face deductions for shortfall to offset those deductions against weeks when the total wage is in balance or when there is a gain. This legislation does not contain such provisions, and it is quite unacceptable.

The blatant inadequacies in part I are only a prelude to the abhorrent nature of part II and the proposals for the reform of wages councils. We hear constantly from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Ministers, and we have heard again today, that wages councils price workers out of jobs. I know of only one body that has had that effect on the British people—the Government. Bankrupt of ideas for industrial and economic regeneration, they have savaged the country, particularly the area of the west midlands, and reduced it to a human wasteland.

Last month, my constituency reached a new all-time high of more than 7,000 people out of jobs. The black country towns have always been low-wage areas. It is not the wages councils that have put the people there out of work; it is Government policy that has put them on the dole.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): Does the hon. Lady agree that during the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s many workers in the steel and associated industries in the black country were not low-paid? They may have had to work hard for their money, but some people in those industries earned good money.

Miss Boothroyd: People in the steel foundries in the black country have always worked hard for their money. I have visited all the foundries in my area, and even today in some places one cannot see 6 ft in front of one because of the dust and grime. People who have worked in those conditions have always earned their money. I do not accept that the money was good in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. My area has traditionally been a low-wage area. The hon. Gentleman may think that the wages there have been better than in other areas, but I do not accept that.

There is little evidence that if wages were reduced from between £65 and £72 a week, to between £55 and £62 a week it would create a significant number of jobs. If the Minister has such evidence, it is incumbent on him to let us have it. The best evidence that I could find—and I am being very generous—is that if wages councils were abolished, about 6,000 jobs would be made available. That is a generous estimate, and I have studied a great deal of evidence. To put that figure in perspective, on average unemployment, which is now well above 5,000 per constituency, it would mean only about 20 new jobs per constituency. That does not improve job prospects. It is merely a drop in the ocean. For the Government to argue that either the abolition of wages councils or reforms to remove their teeth will create jobs is not true.

Mr. Baldry *rose*——

Miss Boothroyd: The hon. Gentleman has already made his comments. I hope that the House will bear with me if I consider some more simple figures.

The Low Pay Unit tells us that young males have accepted wage rises which are 23 per cent. lower than the average increases for adult males, and that the comparative figure for young women is 30 per cent. Falling wage rates among young people show no increase in employment. What has happened is that there has been a trebling of

[Miss Boothroyd]

unemployment among young people. Therefore, for the Government to base their deregulation argument on job creation is pie in the sky. It is shocking that the Government have decided to ignore the need to provide minimum wage machinery for young people. The legislation is a savage attack on the young, and underlines the Government's shameful action in abolishing employment protection machinery.

But it is not only an attack upon the young. I am also worried about the potential of clause 13. It is a dangerous clause because it allows further abolition of protection. It empowers the Secretary of State to remove individual employers from the scope of wages councils. In future it will be interesting to see which firms are released from their present obligations to employees. No doubt firms such as Trusthouse Forte and others in the catering and service industry which make considerable contributions to Tory party funds will have little trouble in persuading the Secretary of State to remove them from the scope of wages councils.

In this country one third of the work force—about 8 million people—live on or near the official poverty line. About 3 million of them are protected by wages councils. Those people are receiving between £60 and £70 a week in wages. In the past four years, of establishments visited by wages inspectors about 37 per cent. were found to be under-paying. On average, some 10,000 complaints are received each year, and of those the wages councils discovered that some 70,000 people were being underpaid.

It is scandalous that the Government can even contemplate reducing the protection of those people. The new philosophy of caring capitalism to which we were treated last week, if it means anything in practice, means the retention and strengthening of wages councils rather than their emasculation and abolition. Conservative Members—although very few have been present today—should think very carefully tonight rather than merely follow a blind rationale which has no evidence at all to support it.

6.31 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The Bill is mean and repugnant and comes from a mean and spiteful Government. There has always been too wide a gap in this country in pay and wealth. Those at the top get too much and those at the bottom too little and that position is now getting much worse. There has been a pay explosion in the City of London and among company directors while the Government are taking away from those at the bottom what little they have.

For a century, wages councils have sought to give at least some little protection to the weakest and poorest in our society and the most vulnerable in the labour market. The councils seek to protect those who are unorganised, in scattered workplaces, women part-timers, home workers and ethnic minorities. All those groups are disadvantaged when compared to the rest of the work force.

No one would say that the pay of those people is anything but low. The Government's consultation document gives the figures of £63 to £73 a week. No one could say that such a pittance is a living wage. Nor could they say that the distribution of earnings has changed, particularly for those at the bottom. Their earnings, relative to the rest, have changed little for a century. No one can say that the pay of workers in the wages councils sector has increased relative to others. The reverse is true. An answer to a question I asked on 15 January 1985 showed that in 1974 pay in the wages councils sector was 73 per cent. of that of all industries and services. In 1984, 10 years later, it had declined to only 65 per cent. The same is true of youth wages.

There is no evidence that wages councils are pushing up wages to unrealistic levels, nor is there any evidence that weakening wages councils will create more jobs. Ministers who appeared before the Select Committee on Employment could give no evidence for that. The Select Committee concluded:

> "The empirical evidence submitted to the Select Committee does not provide unambiguous support for the notion that the elimination of wages councils would have the sort of employment effect which would provide an overwhelming case for abolition."

The Bill has no intellectual credentials. It is not based on evidence. It rests solely on the prejudice, dogma and ideological spite of the hard Right.

The Government want even lower wages at the bottom of the heap and they pretend that that would create more jobs. However, they said that when they abolished the fair wages resolution and schedule 11 to the Employment Protection Act 1975. Again, when asked at the Select Committee, the Government were unable to say how many jobs that had created. Of course they cannot state how many, as no jobs have been created.

If low wages created jobs and economic success, we should be at the top of the European league, as our wages are the lowest. If wage cuts, especially for the lowest paid, are the key, critical variable affecting the success of the economy as a whole, why are wages lowest in the parts of the United Kingdom where unemployment is highest and vice versa? Why are wages higher in successful industries than in less successful ones? Why is Calcutta not an example of prosperity? Obviously the Government are getting other things wrong, such as the exchange rate, interest rates and their training policy. It is wrong to expect the low paid to carry the can.

There has been a salary bonanza at the top of British industry, which has spiralled out of control. That has happened especially in the City of London where salaries, and what I now understand are called financial packages, have increased by 100 per cent. in the past two years. All sorts of people receive over £250,000 a year, yet the new earnings survey showed that the poor got poorer in 1985. The bottom 10 per cent. had pay increases less than the rate of inflation and the top 10 per cent. well above that. There has been a major increase in inequality. The sharp, real cuts for the worse off have been accompanied by the highest unemployment, while the well off, who have done best, have the least unemployment.

The ideological argument is that, if wages are forced down sufficiently, they will reach a market clearing rate. That would mean that unemployment would end. There are very few outside the loony Right who would believe that. The former Under-Secretary of State for Employment, who has moved on—I do not know if this is why he moved on—said on 18 December 1985 in response to a Conservative Back Bencher:

"The Government are considering the future of the wages council system. The point about young people will be taken on board, but even he will recognise that not every young person in every region will get a job at whatever level of wages."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1984; Vol. 70, c. 152-3.]

Only the loony Right could believe such ideological nonsense.

That approach becomes monstrously unfair and unjust because pay and remuneration in Britain are not decided by the laws of supply and demand. Members of Parliament are a good example of that. Many more people want to become Members of Parliament than there are places. Plenty of people would be willing to be Members of Parliament for no wages at all. Where does the law of supply and demand in the market apply to Members of Parliament? Is not the same true of admirals, generals, the judiciary and civil servants?

In the higher reaches of industry, the directors merely vote each other huge salaries. The wages of most workers are covered by collective bargaining. Therefore, most people are covered by some form of institutional machinery. The proposal is not that all that should be altered and deregulated. It singles out those at the bottom where wages councils provide some kind of institutional framework to help those without organisation and attacks, deregulates and depresses them. That is absolutely monstrous.

Mr. Baldry: Surely the converse of that is true. The lowest paid will be the only group in the community to have wages council protection to ensure that there is a level below which it cannot fall. They will be the only people in the community who will get protection. It will not be removed. The hon. Member and other Opposition Members speak as if the wages councils will be abolished. With respect, they will not be abolished; rather, they will be reformed.

Mr. Leighton: They are not going to be abolished yet. The Bill is a halfway house on the way to abolition. The hon. Gentleman's point was very obscure. Normally he is perspicacious and sharp as he understands these matters well and writes pamphlets about them.

The hon. Gentleman knows as well as all hon. Members that most people's pay is not decided by the laws of supply and demand. It is covered by institutional machinery. The suggestion is not that we should abolish the institutional machinery for everybody, but that we should tamper with the minimum of institutional machinery that protects those at the bottom of the pile. That is monstrous, offensive and repugnant.

I find it particularly repugnant to listen in the House to wealthy Members with good contracts of employment, good salaries and pensions turning on the poorest and claiming that their wages must be reduced for the public good while those hon. Members stay on the gravy train.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): I merely wish to endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) said in his intervention. He made the point that we are talking about youngsters under the age of 21. My hon. Friend suggested that the hon. Gentleman is making the wrong speech in the wrong debate. He is assuming that we are going to scrap the wages council system. That is incorrect.

Mr. Leighton: I heard the point the first time it was made. The second intervention adds nothing to it.

It is doubly offensive to tackle wages councils which protect those at the bottom of the pile when the Bill comes only months after top people—top civil servants, judges and senior service personnel — were given prodigious increases in their already too high salaries. Some, like the Cabinet Secretary, received up to 47 per cent. What is it but hypocrisy to give so much to those at the top whilst depriving those at the bottom? It is obscene.

I come to the point made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) about young people. There is no justification whatever for removing young people from the protection of the wages councils. With their inexperience and their desire for a job, they are the most vulnerable of all. If the hon. Gentleman does not wish to listen to me, he may listen to the CBI which told the Select Committee: "There was little enthusiasm for the suggestion that all young workers should be excluded from coverage by wages councils."

The fairy story about young people pricing themselves into jobs has been tested. Since 1979, youth wages have been reduced, absolutely and relative to those of adults. I was told in a parliamentary answer on 16 January 1985 that between April 1979 and April 1984 the average gross earnings of males over 21 increased by 79 per cent., but those for 18 to 20-year-olds increased by only 63 per cent., and the under-18s by only 57 per cent. Youth wages had fallen by 23 per cent. in relation to male adults. Young women's pay had fallen by 30 per cent. Did it work? Did youth employment increase? The contrary happened. Youth unemployment has actually trebled. The argument is bogus.

A differential between youth and adult wages is justifiable, but there is no evidence that the differential has become too narrow. Is the argument that it should become so pronounced that it would provide an attractive cheap subistitute for adult labour, thus leading to more adult unemployment? Adult unemployment is more expensive for the state because of the difference in adult and youth benefits.

Research shows that any increase in the employment of young people, because of their cheapness as a result of their wages being forced down by their exclusion from wages councils, would be largely at the expense of adults. That is what is known as the substitution effect.

In most wages council trades, there is little difference in the jobs done by adults and young people. There would be an inducement which would be likely to lead to the dismissal of young people on reaching adult age. That is what is known as the age trap. In other words, the sack would be a 21st birthday present. What sort of early employment experience would that be for young people?

The Bill confirms to young people that the Government are their enemy. Instead of this mean and spiteful measure, the Government should be securing better access for youth labour to the main labour market by providing decent education and training rather than developing a low-wage youth unemployment sector providing cheap substitutes for adults.

The Bill aims other blows at vulnerable low-paid workers. Orders can be simplified, but that does not mean, as the Bill lays down, that there should be a single minimum rate with a single overtime rate. That could destroy paid holidays, weekend pay, shift premiums, guaranteed pay and skill differentials. What justification is there for that? Why steer the worst employers in that direction? The Bill is a halfway house towards complete abolition.

[Mr. Leighton]

Why should workers at the bottom of the pile not be entitled to holidays like everyone else? Why remove the holiday provision? Is the Minister aware that in a number of unorganised industries not presently covered by the wages councils—the security industry and instant print shops are examples—the absence of holiday provision is by no means rare? The only purpose of including that provision is to allow holidays to be cut or eliminated. That would lead to fewer jobs. That is something about which Conservative Members should think when they have their long summer recess. They should realise that abolishing holidays for the lowest paid would increase unemployment.

Overtime rates and premium payments, except for the single rate, are to be excluded, yet the principle of higher rates for weekend working, anti-social hours and shifts has been widely accepted. Why should they be suppressed? The Government appointed the Auld committee to study the Shops Act 1950. The committee strongly recommended the retention of protection for shop workers because

"of the strong likelihood of exploitation of some shopworkers in the form of lower wages particularly for unsocial hours, and possibly in a longer working week."

The Committee said that it

"set great store by the preservation of the role of wages councils in fixing . . . holidays and holiday pay for the retail trade."

I hope that when the Minister replies he will tell us why the Government are turning their back on the Committee that they set up.

Let us consider the Bill's requirements for a single rate of pay. In all cases where there is more than one rate, the rates must be amalgamated. What logic is there in that? Will they be amalgamated up or down? In hairdressing, for example, there is a difference of about £15 between the top and bottom rates. Are some people to be expected to take a drop of about £15 in their pay?

A single rate of pay does not allow for legitimate differentials. Why not? I thought that Conservatives believed in differentials. There is no need for all these restrictions and backward steps. If the Minister thought that wages councils were getting things badly wrong there would be nothing to stop him saying so and asking councils to make adjustments. Employers are represented on all councils and they have independent members. Wages councils should take the decisions. They should not have them imposed arbitrarily upon them by the Government.

We are sometimes told that the wages councils are no longer needed, that they are things of the past. Unfortunately, that is not so. We have already heard that the Auld committee said that they were essential in the retail trade. We hear of cases where cleaning has been privatised. ACAS suggested that we needed a new wages council for contract cleaning. There are new industries such as security, instant print shops, video shops and others where we hear reports of exploitation.

The Minister probably knows that in his area some of the worst sweatshops at the beginning of the century were in the clothing industry. It employed newly arrived immigrants. In recent years, we have had a new group of immigrants, many of whom are being exploited in back-street sweatshops which are often fire hazards, and are as bad as any at the beginning of the century.

Last week, the Paymaster General announced a mouse of a scheme by which some £8 million would be spent in inner-city areas with high immigrant populations. The Bill will add to their employment disadvantages, because they are disproportionately represented in wages council industries. Anyone who is a woman, part of the ethnic minority, young, a part-timer or a home worker, or who works in hotels, catering, retailing, clothing or hairdressing definitely needs wages councils. One of the main reasons why we need a new Labour Government is to restore a proper system of minimum wage and employment protection for the weaker and badly exploited section of our work force.

6.49 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I welcome the Bill with relief, because I had a feeling that the wages councils would be abolished rather than reformed. I am pleased that they are to be reformed. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) made several points about the need for national minimum rates to protect the low paid and to prevent exploitation of new immigrants. However, will those problems be solved by wages council modification? Those problems occur with the present system of wages councils. The Bill retains the wages councils to set minimum rates. It is important that people working in our fragmented industries are protected by a minimum rate.

The Opposition have criticised the single minimum rate for ordinary hours and the single premium rate for overtime hours, but "minimum" is the operative word. There has been criticism of what people earn in the City and what other people earn, but we are discussing wages councils setting minimum rates for industry. Surely that protection is still there for those industries.

The style of the wages councils and how they are set up will not alter. Why should the minimum rate be worse than it is at present?

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) mentioned simplification. That is necessary, because the present complexity of the regulations produced by the wages councils causes confusion among the people whom they are designed to protect. Well-run clothing companies, such as Abbey Hosiery with 1,000 employees in my constituency, know the regulations on health and safety, wages and the rest. Those who do not understand the regulations are the very people who could be helped by them. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East mentioned exploitation of those paid below the rates. That occurs in small companies, but not in the larger well-run companies.

If the wages councils have a limited role in setting wages, there is more chance that throughout industry people will become aware of required rates of pay and they will be more likely to stick to them. In a sample, about 37 per cent. were paid below the rate set by the wages councils, so there is already exploitation. The protection in the Bill is of the right type. It is easily understood and it will apply across the board.

Many aspects that can be interfered with by wages councils, such as working conditions and contracts of employment, are covered by health and safety and other legislation. That legislation should provide adequate protection for workers in these industries.

The majority of industries covered by the Bill are fragmented. It is still difficult to look after areas where there is no control over low wages. The minimum rates set by the wages councils are exceeded time and again by

those firms that have well-organised unions and employee associations. In the clothing industry and many others, people are paid above the minimum rate set by the wages councils. The problem does not apply to all the 2·75 million people nominally looked after by the wages councils. The affected group is much smaller.

It is important to leave the protection of the minimum rate of pay within the orbit of the wages councils. However, I have reservations about the age limit. It is easy for the Opposition to reject the idea that rates of pay for young people have an effect on jobs. If a business has the choice of using people who can contribute to the business, wages are only one of several factors that influence the decision. It is nonsense to suggest that a 21-year-old who has reached a good position in a company is not worth more to the company than he was at 16 or 17. That is the virtue of training people.

The clothing industry is a typical example. The rate of work and the production output of some well-trained people after four years or so is worth maintaining, even though a youngster would be paid less. A youngster would be pushed out if a firm had to pay him a high wage, especially during his early years in the industry. That is not an economic proposition for a company. If a company faces hard times, as many do with competition from abroad and elsewhere, it does not make sense to take the risk of a low return on the money that is invested during the early years.

Mr. Caborn: We are discussing industries that employ semi-skilled or unskilled staff. If a young person of 16 is taken on and after two years in the establishment becomes competent in the job, would the hon. Gentleman accept the scenario that 18 to 20-year-olds on a lower wage, because they are not protected by the revamped wages councils, could displace adult workers over the age of 21 because they would be paid considerably less? The history of industries that employ people under wages council regulations shows that training periods are about one to two and a half years, not the five years that has been suggested. They could very easily displace adult workers.

Mr. Stevens: I would have preferred a lower age limit of 20 years rather than 21 years. I share some of the hon. Gentleman's concern, but not to the same extent. As people progress within an industry, especially in a small business, they become more useful, so the return on investment is still present. However, I do not agree with all the hon. Gentleman's argument. People are kept on if they are useful to a business.

I believe that five years is a relatively long period, and far longer than the general training period in those industries.

Apart from that small reservation on the age limit, I believe that the general principle is right. The fragmentation of the industries that are covered by the wages councils means that the decision to employ a young person is influenced by wage rates and the return, because in many cases those industries employ few people. To employ young people is a considerable commitment by a small company.

Mr. Nellist: The hon. Gentleman talks about the abolition of wages councils for young workers, most of whom work in the shops and distributive trades. Has he seen the comments of the management of Dixons—the electronics shops — yesterday or the day before, objecting to a two-year YTS scheme because they cannot provide enough training to keep those kids going for two years? That is precisely the point which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) was trying to make.

Mr. Stevens: I am amazed that a company which should wish to train people to acquire the knowledge that they need, would reject the YTS. That is not generally the view of companies, especially small companies, which, to get the best out of people, need that training period. It is an investment in their future.

The proposed legislation on wages councils is not the dramatic anti-employee or anti-youth measure suggested by the Opposition. It provides a basic protection to adult workers and it does not completely remove the recognition of young people's needs. Many companies will pay higher wages and will reward effort. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) mentioned differentials, which can be negotiated and included. We should not forget that trade union and employee negotiations have a much wider scope than sole reliance on wages councils.

I am pleased that we have retained the wages councils because they act as a good guide to small businesses, which do not wish to exploit their employees, to know the normal rates that they should pay. Such businesses can say, "We know the minimum, but if we pay £5 or £10 extra to someone who does a good job, it is simply a recognition of his efforts." Removing the complexities will do nothing but good.

Some hon. Members have asked whether we should have told wages councils that they were not doing their job. During the Labour Government, some of the decisions made by wages councils caused some embarrassment to those who were trying to introduce pay norms. Wages councils have a duty to recognise the impact of their decisions on the industry and on those who come within their orbit. We have provided a much more successful pattern for the future. It will be simpler, and much easier to run and, at the end of the day, will provide basic protection. It is not a rejection of wages councils, but a simplification of the present process.

Far too much is made of the Government's attempt to get rid of some of the obstacles to employment, when all that we are trying to do is to provide a choice between cash payments and non-cash payments without causing great difficulty to employees. The contractual obligations can be worked out between employers and the work force, and the repeal of the Truck Acts can do nothing but benefit the general negotiating position. It is possible to object in theory to removing those laws, but in practice it must be good to say to people, "Our modern system is handled mainly by the bank." For most people, the option will not detract from their present rights.

Mr. Caborn: But it is not an option. The Bill will provide that an employer can deny a request for cash payment by an employee, so the option of cash payment is being removed.

Mr. Stevens: The employer can decide the matter. The general effect will be simply to remove some antiquated practices.

The Bill is a step forward in our attempt to create a better atmosphere, especially for small businesses, to provide simpler administration for payment of wages and

[Mr. Stevens]

for the control of wages councils. In line with "Lifting the Burden", it must be step forward in our industrial and commercial activities.

7.4 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Miss Boothroyd) and I are Members sponsored by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, which fought so hard to stop employers paying the poverty wages imposed by wages councils. The last thing that the low-paid want today is lectures from part-time Tory Members of Parliament such as we have heard this afternoon.

When the Paymaster General introduced the Bill, he said that it was to deal with the problems of today's economic climate. What are today's problems? More than 4 million people are on the dole; crime rates are the highest that we have experienced; suicides are increasing; our manufacturing industry is collapsing round our necks; for the first time since the industrial revolution, we are importing more than we export; there is a record number of bankruptcies; the National Health Service is suffering from the turmoils of privatisation, which has resulted in hardship for patients and employees; and our education system is at a standstill with no prospect of a return to normality, because of the Government's obstinacy. Those are the problems of today, and that is what the Paymaster General should have said when he introduced this paltry Bill.

On the day on which the White Paper on employment was published, the Government announced the recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body. One Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and accepted recommendations to increase the pay of judges, admirals and generals by up to 47 per cent., and the next Minister, who has now been banished to Northern Ireland, said that we would deratify ILO convention 26. That shows the cynicism of the Government. That is one reason why they have had to introduce this paltry Bill, which is aimed at the lowest paid.

Part II deals with the removal of those aged under 21 from the scope of the wages councils. That will affect about 500,000 young workers. The Government claim that that will create jobs, but no economic evidence supports that assertion. The truth is the reverse. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West mentioned wages since 1979. Since then, young males have accepted wage increases which are 23 per cent. less than the average increases for male employees, and young women's pay has increased at a rate 30 per cent. lower than that of adult women. In 1984, young workers aged under 18, excluding all YTS trainees, received average wages equivalent to about 37 per cent. of the average adult wage. In 1948, 10 per cent. of 16 to 17-year-old males earned less than £38 for a full week's work, plus overtime. Those are the people who are supposed to be pricing themselves out of jobs.

Those who work in hairdressing receive paltry wages, yet they still have to pay electricity and gas bills and buy clothes and food to survive. None of the Tory Members who have spoken has experienced such conditions, although not long ago the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) came to Newcastle and tried to live on unemployment benefit. He ran out of money before the end of the week. He was in debt by the Wednesday. He went round the pubs in Newcastle bumming beer, because he could not afford a pint. Yet he is one of those who lecture the low-paid. Those well-heeled Members of Parliament have jobs outside here as well as their fat parliamentary salaries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) referred to holiday provision. This will be the only EEC country that fails to provide legal holiday entitlements for all workers, if that is taken out of wages councils orders as the Bill suggests.

The Bill also talks about setting a single rate of pay. The first consequence is that the wages councils will have no jurisdiction over a wide range of terms and conditions, including shift premium rates of pay. The Shops Bill will force people to work on Sundays and this Bill will mean that they are not covered by wages councils, because such provision will be taken out of wages councils orders. That is how the Government are dealing with the lowest paid.

Part I relates to deductions from pay. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West spoke about hotel and catering wages, in which young people get a lodging allowance taken from their wages. The Bill will give unscrupulous employers the chance to take all sorts of things from the employee's wages. Wages councils also deal with the cost of laundering. Again, if the Bill is passed, that will not be covered.

We shall be the first of the 94 signatories to the ILO convention to deratify. That will be a disgrace for this country internationally, because the convention concerns the lowest paid.

The northern region has recently set up a new Low Pay Unit. I pay tribute to Michael Campbell, the leader of Tyne and Wear county council, and Tom Bayliss, the chairman of the TUC northern region, whose efforts resulted in the setting up of the unit. It has said that, in addition to the region's 250,000 people out of work, nearly 500,000 people are in work but fall in the low wage category. Not many hon. Members who have spoken today have been in that situation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said, women suffer especially from the hardship of low pay because often they are the only persons in the family who can find work. Therefore, they take over the role of the breadwinner. Half the women who do part-time work in the northern region are paid less than £2 an hour, and over 60 per cent. of full-time working women are paid less than £100 a week. The official published figures show that Tyne and Wear workers are among the lowest paid in the country. That does not bear out the Government's argument that if one accepts lower wages, there will be more employment. We have the lowest wages in the country but also the highest unemployment.

The Minister has spoken about youngsters pricing themselves into work by taking lower wages. But what will happen to those whom they price out of work? Where can they go if the youngsters take lower wages? What will happen to the adults covered by the wages councils? The Bill is a charter for unscrupulous employers who will pay off the adults and employ young slave labour. That is what the Government want.

The hon. Member for Penrith and The Borders (Mr. Maclean), who has only just come in, has probably been in the Dining Room and spent more on a dinner than some young waiters receive for a week's wages. We are subsidising such meals. In my area, shipyard workers and workers skilled in heavy industry, who have unhealthy and

unsafe jobs, are still among the lowest paid in the country. That is because employers have a reservoir of the unemployed, which is forcing workers' wages down.

The Bill has nothing to do with employment. It is meant only to carry out the Government's cynical dogma. It will force youngsters to take lower wages and allow employers to pay off adults and employ youngsters. When the youngsters become 21, they will find themselves on the street.

I hope that we shall reject the Bill. My hon. Friends have expressed many fears. I fear that we shall get ourselves bogged down in technicalities. We must remember that we are talking about the lowest paid workers, who will be paid even less, and whose conditions will worsen with the effects of the Bill. I hope that some Conservative Members have a conscience and will join us in the Lobby to vote against the Bill.

7.15 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): The Select Committee on Employment spent many weeks on a study on the low-paid. I have no doubt that when Conservative Members originally considered the low pay issue they had made up their minds that they would abolish the wages councils. However, the evidence submitted to the Committee was so overwhelmingly against that proposal, which came not just from trade unions and workers, but from industry, that it became obvious that the Government could not be so hard-faced as to abolish wages councils. They thought that, to start with, they would take on the under-21s. I say "to start with", because I believe that the Government's ultimate intention is to abolish wages councils altogether.

Mr. David Lightbown (Staffordshire, East): Hear, hear.

Mr. Eastham: I hear an hon. Member saying, "Hear, hear". I wish that he would stand up so that he can be identified, instead of grunting in the corner. I shall gladly give way if he wishes to say something.

Mr. Lightbown: It will be in the record.

Mr. Eastham: We know that 2·7 million workers, mainly women, are affected. We also realise that by and large they are not organised. They have no trade unions to fight for them. This is the consequence of the poor working conditions and the indignities that they have to suffer.

Wages councils are set up as a safety net. As the Minister insisted that the legislation would increase jobs, it is reasonable to pose a question. Why is it that the right hon. and learned Gentleman uses the lowest paid working group to create more jobs? There might be some logic in somebody on £250 or £300 a week creating more jobs, but no action is proposed for them. The Government are attacking the people who are on starvation pay.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) said, we shall be the first country to revoke ILO convention 26. We are a so-called civilised nation, a so-called progressive nation, but countries such as Italy, France, Germany and many others still believe that there is a case for wages councils.

Last year the Department of Trade and Industry ran a survey that was tied up with a document called "Burdens on Business". It is interesting to note that, on the analysis of the questionnaire, only eight of the 200 companies spoke about wages councils. Of the 19 so-called burdens, wages came sixteenth in the list.

Mr. Trippier: I was the co-ordinating Minister for that report, and of those covered in the survey only a relatively small percentage were covered by the wages councils or in wages councils industries. That is the simple explanation.

Mr. Eastham: Perhaps the Minister will agree that their priorities were not as expected. By and large, the important issue was the high interest rates charged by the banks. It was not about low-paid workers. As a percentage of the finished goods, low pay was not a factor.

Evidence from Japan and Germany has shown that if one treats the employee fairly and properly there is an increase in productivity and profitability. These countries, which are pointed out to us as being so successful, state that to treat their workers properly has a benefit. When one listens to the Conservative Government, one realises that their policy is the exact reverse. We aim, but fail, to compete with Japan and Germany. Within the worker groups of the wages councils, there are a great number of black workers. They are mostly unskilled workers and are once again affected.

It is rather interesting to note that America has recognised the problems. I should like to quote from President Johnson, who made a statement about riotous outbreaks in 1968 in the United States. He said:

> "The only long-range solution for what is happening lies in an attack . . . on the conditions that breed despair and violence . . . ignorance, discrimination, slums, poverty, disease, not enough jobs. We should attack these conditions not because we are frightened of conflict but because we are fired with conscience . . . because there is no other way to achieve a decent and orderly society".

I only wish that this Government would pick up some of these messages, because danger signals are there. I spent two days in Liverpool this week with the Employment Select Committee and met some of the black groups who are in absolute despair of the policies and the complete disregard for their lot in society.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) made a point that should be handed on constantly to this Government —that it is in areas of low pay that high unemployment exists. I am sure that my hon. Friend was made aware of that during his visit to Liverpool. If the Conservative Government's arguments are correct there should be full employment in Merseyside, but in fact there is 22 per cent. unemployment.

Mr. Eastham: I am well aware of that, and I fully endorse what my hon. Friend says. The Government cannot ignore the direct link between poverty and wages. There is also a direct connection with ill health and premature death. These are the results of inadequate diet, clothing, heating and housing. All these are the sad effects of poverty. This legislation will contribute to and increase these problems, yet we in the Select Committee meet groups and try to convince people that we really care and want to do something about these problems.

Are wages too high? Why does it always have to be the lowest paid who have to make the sacrifices? National average pay at present is about £168 per week. However, a newspaper published on 13 January 1986 spoke of a "£24-a-week 'slave labour' probe . . . A 'sweat shop' laundry."

[Mr. Eastham]

In Preston there are adults working for 60p an hour—£26 per week. The Minister said that the minimum wage for youngsters, 60 per cent. of the adult wage, is too high, yet 60 per cent. of that £26 would be about £15·60. According to the Government's analysis, that figure is too high.

I wish to relate some of the experiences that I have had in the city of Manchester. I initiated the Adjournment debate of 5 July 1984, on Phillips Rubber Limited. A constituent had come to see me who had a wife and two children and whose basic rate of pay was £48 a week. The workers negotiated a wage increase and the company's final offer was an increase of £1·92. The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service was approached, but this benevolent company rejected any proposals. These are some of the wages which the Government say are too high.

Another example of pricing oneself out of work, in modern Tory Britain, concerned a cleaning contract firm. The firm used some women as part-time cleaners. The wage for five nights work was £17·50. The management declared that it was changing that and that it would give the women £1·50 as an attendance rate to make sure that they turned up for all five nights. However it was not £1·50 extra. The management reduced the basic wage to £16 a week and the women would obtain the £17·50 only if they were good girls and made sure they were there for the five nights. These are the type of wages that one can quote.

I am pleased and proud of the fact that in the Greater Manchester area a local low pay unit has been set up. It is doing some magnificent work. It recently published a document which said:

"One in three full-time workers in Greater Manchester earn less than the Council of Europe's "decency threshold" for wages. Amongst part timers four out of five earn poverty wages. Only two other major urban regions have a worse record . . . About 25,000 establishments are covered by wages councils in the Greater Manchester area. The vast majority of these are shops, pubs and clubs, hotels, restaurants, and cafes, hairdressers and clothing manufacturers."

It is interesting to report to the House that the low pay unit in Manchester makes observations about the cuts in wages inspectors and the consequent illegal underpayment of the minimum rates of pay. In 1984, 1,310 workplaces —5·3 per cent. of those in the region—were inspected, and 43 per cent. of all employers visited in the Greater Manchester area were found to be breaking the law. Despite the Government's strong line about law and order, there has not been one prosecution as a result of those inspections of stinking rates of pay.

I shall give just one example of a cleaner in a medium-sized contract cleaning firm in Alton, Lancashire. She was female, aged 35 and had three children at school. She worked 15 hours a week and received £1·20 an hour. It cost her £2 a week to travel to work and she had to pay for cleaning overalls, which cost another £1. She lost £3 immediately, even out of her meagre pay. These are starvation rates of pay. These are the issues about which, if the Government have a conscience, they should do something. I have a question for the Minister, and I should like answer. If low pay is the answer, why is there not full employment in India, Pakistan or Portugal, which are low-wage economies?

I was in a jobcentre in Liverpool on Monday and I observed that much the same was happening there as in Manchester. Some of the rates of pay are so insulting and embarrassing even for employers that they no longer put the pay on the card, but say, "Wages negotiable." The Minister ought to give a directive to jobcentres through the Manpower Services Commission to say, "We are not prepared to take these adverts until the rates of pay are clearly stated." We know what "negotiable" means—the lowest wages that employers can get away with, and even that would be too much for some of them.

The Minister spoke about values. I shall never forget the Prime Minister at the last general election talking about Victorian values — Victorian values such as poverty, disease, the workhouse, rickets, fear, slums and practical slavery. Those are the values that the Government really want to return to. The Bill is Robin Hood in reverse. The robber barons are back in Britain.

7.32 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the House for interrupting this important debate, but I wish to raise a matter which is directly related to the rights of the House.

A little while ago, in another place, amendments proposed by Lord Denning, and carried with the assistance of Lord Stockton, turned upside down, reversed and wrecked one of the principal and fundamental clauses of the Shops Bill. The amendment means that clause 2 of that Bill, instead of withdrawing Shops Act 1950 protection from all employees aged over 18, reinstates and entrenches Shops Act protection for all workers in shops, not just shop assistants. It includes all of those employed in connection with retail trades and businesses. It is a fundamental amendment to a Bill which is due shortly to come to this House.

I understand that the procedures of the other place do not permit the Government at this late stage to reverse the amendments. Therefore, when the Bill comes to this House, instead of doing what the Government originally proposed, it will entrench the rights of all workers in shops. That is the Bill which the Home Secretary will have to present for a Second Reading, unless the Government decide not to proceed. It is important for the House to know whether the Government intend to withdraw the Shops Bill as the other place has torpedoed it. If, however, the Government decide to present it to the House for Second Reading in the form in which it will come from the other place——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman but I am not quite clear what connection there is between that Bill and today's debate in this House.

Mr. Kaufman: I am raising my point of order for two reasons. First, this is an urgent matter which has just presented itself and, secondly, it is directly relevant to the Wages Bill. The Shops Bill claims to introduce reforms recommended by the Auld committee, and the Wages Bill addresses another of the Auld committee's recommendations. That is why the matter is directly relevant and why it is appropriate and necessary to put to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point of order on which I should be grateful for your ruling and advice.

The Shops Bill and the Wages Bill run in tandem. When the Shops Bill is presented to this House by the Home Secretary will he be obliged to commend a Bill

which runs in tandem with the Wages Bill and which, if it is introduced in the form in which it will leave the other place, will entrench the rights of shop workers? The Shops Bill will contain other matters about which we are worried. Will the Government be obliged to proceed with the protection of shop workers which Lord Stockton has made it necessary for them to proceed with?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has already made it clear that this is largely a matter for the Government, and not for the Chair. When the Shops Bill eventually reaches this House, it will be dealt with in the form in which it then stands. As for today's debate, the House knows that we are masters of our procedure and that no event that might have taken place today in another place will in any way alter our procedure or our debate on this Bill. Of course, it is perfectly in order, if it is felt appropriate, to refer in argument in the debate on the Wages Bill to debates that may be taking place on another Bill in another place.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) wants to take part in our proceedings on the Wages Bill, I am sure that the whole House will welcome his trying to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As for events in another place, I understand that an amendment has been carried by a majority of one against the Government. It would not be right for the Government or the House to prejudge that amendment now, but I think that it will be found on examination that it is by no means as fundamental to the objects of the Bill as the right hon. Member obviously hopes.

To my understanding it is by no means unusual, if a Bill commences in another place, for that House to amend the Bill so that it begins its progress through this House in a different form. It would be quite wrong for the Government to anticipate their reaction to amendments in another place at this time and to prejudge whatever decisions this House might want to reach in due course about the final form of the Bill. I can, however, assure the House that any suggestion that we might withdraw the Shops Bill is absurd.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is most unusual to debate a measure that is being debated in another place. I am very anxious that we return to the debate on the Wages Bill.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): In the Auld report it will be recalled that the two questions were inextricably linked—the shops legislation on the one hand and the wages councils legislation on the other. If the Government are in difficulties and would like to reconsider their position, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it not within your power to suspend the sitting and consideration of the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am very surprised to hear some hon. Members of this House saying that we should be unduly influenced by what is taking place in the other House. Let us return to the debate on the Wages Bill.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am in difficulty. As you know, I seek to catch the eye of the Chair in the debate and if I succeed, I intend to make specific reference to the wages council order which deals with anti-social shifts, split shifts, weekend working and night work, which have traditionally been rewarded with extra payment. Under the Wages Bill, this will no longer be the case. One industry in which this will be felt particularly is retailing with the forthcoming——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman seems to be telling me that he has an additional argument which he wishes to use in his speech. He will be perfectly entitled to do so if he is called in the debate.

7.42 pm

Mr. Gerard Neale (Cornwall, North): One ought perhaps to express some thanks to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) for having introduced into the debate some excitement and interest.

I wish to confine my remarks to what has been said particularly by the hon. Members for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) and for West Bromwich, West, (Miss Boothroyd). Having served with the hon. Members for Manchester, Blackley and for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown) on the Select Committee on Employment, I know that they care deeply about employment and unemployment matters. While they would no doubt claim for themselves a deep sincerity of purpose for the people whom they represent, in particular those who are unemployed, I think that they should not question the sincerity of purpose of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Employment and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench who see a different solution to the problem. It may be that one solution is more right than another, but we on the Conservative Benches are equally worried about the situation, and are determined to find ways to alleviate the problem of unemployment and to produce the best solutions.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, West referred to the fact that the Bill was lacking in giving to those who have had unfair and unwarranted deductions made from their pay the right to appeal to industrial tribunals. I should have thought that clause 6 is quite clear on their rights in that event.

There is a fundamental difference between the two sides on this issue. The Opposition seem to believe that, because an individual, of whatever age, warrants a size of wage packet that will enable him to lead a certain way of life, however simple that may be, it is therefore possible for that wage to be met by the employer. As a Member who comes from a very low wage economy area, nobody knows better than I that businesses are not necessarily able to pay such wages. If a company is not generating sufficient profit, the work is often there to be done, but there is not the money to meet the wage expectations outlined by Opposition Members.

The Bill is refreshing in that it cuts through some of the hypocrisy and humbug surrounding employment legislation as it affects wages. The vital thrust of the Bill is that it provides for a person's work to become more attractive to a prospective employer. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North referred to the top salaries review body, and the fact that the Government wished to see the recommendations enacted. I do not regard the two things as being in conflict. The Government realised that in certain areas we were losing the right people simply because we were not paying enough to keep them.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that any Defence Minister has ever been short of suitable candidates for promotion to general, air marshal or admiral?

Mr. Neale: From personal experience of particular ranks, no. However, I know that the legal profession has a severe problem in getting the right people to take the top jobs of judges and so on.

Young people must be made attractive to employers as employees. While the employer may have work for them to do, his business may not justify his paying them the appropriate wage. Some youngsters are willing to work at the rate which the employer can offer, but to enter into such an arrangement would be immediately to break the law. This must be borne in mind.

It must be realised that, particularly in places such as Cornwall, employers are well versed in the effects of unemployment. Tourism has been mentioned. In such places as Newquay, Bude and other parts of Cornwall, employers know that unless the holidays which they are selling are competitive in price and in what they can offer with those available in Spain, they will be unable to sell them. The prices at which the holidays can be sold will affect the level of wages. Either we sell holidays at prices that people will pay or we do not sell holidays and do not employ workers. We cannot get away from that. One problem in my constituency is that often unemployment benefit is in excess of what employers can pay, so it is better financially for people to stay on the dole.

The amendments to the Truck Acts 1831 to 1940 are long overdue. It must make sense to restrict regular cash movements between banks and employers. In the United States, the movement of money from banks to employers and out to employees constitutes only about 1 per cent. of the total payroll. In Germany the relevant figure is 5 per cent. and here it is 37 per cent., with all the attendant problems of administration and wage snatches.

Let us examine those two aspects. If the administration of a business is made more simple, its products become more competitive in price. That leads to two things. Management can pay more to employees who are engaged in production or the company can become more competitive and thus increase its viability and the number of jobs it can offer. In regard to robberies, again there are tremendous additional social costs involved for people detecting the crimes, for insurance payments, for subsequent court actions, and for prison thereafter for those who are convicted.

Because of the competition that has developed among banks during the period of office of this Government, those who shift to being paid through banks find that their bank accounts are not subject to charges if they remain in credit. Also they have a 24-hour money service through cash machines. So payment of wages through banks is not inconvenient but in many ways makes life easier.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend's decision to restrict the role of wages councils to wages and payment matters and to rule out negotiations on many fringe benefits. Major employers tell us that they often have to carry out two sets of negotiations, one with the unions on various fringe benefits and another with wages councils. Opposition Members will no doubt say that trade unions want to get the best conditions they can for their members. One respects that view, but it constantly raises the wage factor in a business. Opposition Members may ask what is wrong with that. When one is managing a company, one knows that only a certain wage factor can be carried as an overall cost before it starts to hit the cost of the product or service that is provided. Opposition Members must realise that. If the wages cost is too high, an employer immediately find ways of making his business more efficient. In doing so he may shed staff, so that hits the very people that the trade unions are trying to protect.

Despite what Opposition Members say, the most welcome part of the Bill deals with young people. It would be ludicrous for anyone to say that the Bill will cure youth unemployment. Of course it will not and no one is suggesting that for a single moment. Without any shadow of a doubt, however, it will help in many instances to increase the chances of young people being able to take work for which they will be paid. Some employers complain that they cannot employ some young people because of their educational standard. Other employers blame the lack of maturity of young people. But all too often employers find that young people of 16, 17 and 18 have too high an expectation of the starting wage or of the amount that they will be earning within a short time. Their expectations are so high compared with the value of the work they will be doing that employers cannot afford to employ them.

If we make a comparison between ourselves and places such as West Germany we find that apprentices in West Germany get 15 per cent. to 25 per cent. of the adult wage, whereas here it is 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. and in some cases even 75 per cent. Therefore, it is self-evident that there will be a great problem unless we reduce the amounts that young people receive.

Opposition Members get very upset when the abbreviation EEPTU is mentioned, because to them it is a rogue union at the moment. It entered into an arrangement with electrical contractors whereby the wage of apprentices was reduced from £41·63 to £27·88. As a result, between 1982 and 1984 the number of apprentices went up from 850 to 3,210. That is the example that Opposition Members should consider.

Various hon. Members have said that the Bill will do nothing to increase the number of jobs. A study carried out by the Department of Employment suggested that 50,000 jobs had been lost between 1954 and 1979 because of wages councils. According to another report, 230,000 jobs could result from the abolition of wages councils. Even a report made for the Leader of the Opposition admitted that more jobs would come. The most critical point, borne out by surveys and by my experience in my own constituency, is that if a young person is given the option of no likely job or a job at a reasonable wage, though not as good as he had hoped for, he will be pleased to take the work because he will see an opportunity to better himself.

None of my right hon. or hon. Friends sees the Bill as a cure-all for the unemployment problem, particularly for young people, but those of us who have studied the problem in our own areas are aware that work is available in many small businesses but they are restricted because of the amount that they are required by wages councils to pay. They can offer work because they have work to be done. The level of profitability in those firms is limited simply because of their turnover and the amount that they can trade. I think that the Bill will offer better possibilities for those people and in that sense what my right hon. and learned Friend is attempting to do is welcome and should be supported.

8 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): When the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) was called, I thought that we would have a contribution from a Conservative Member which would relate to the Bill. Indeed, as the hon. Gentleman represents part of the country which has some of the lowest paid workers, one would expect him to speak up for them. That did not come through. I hope that on reflection, when reading his speech, he will realise that he did not do justice to his constituents. I hope that as many of his constituents as possible will read his remarks.

The Bill has been described by many hon. Members as repellent, repugnant or paltry, but I certainly think that it is a national disgrace. It is yet another example of the Government's attitude to the low-paid worker. We have heard about Victorian values from some hon. Members relating to what the Prime Minister said at the general election. Even in Victoriana the low-paid workers were protected in one form or another by Parliament.

When the Minister opened the debate, he said that the Bill represented progress. He was talking in a language which certainly no Opposition Member understood when he said that the Bill was about employment. If one looks at the figures produced by the hon. Member for Cornwall, North one certainly cannot argue that it is about employment. It is not, and the Government know it.

I wonder why the Government, with all their problems, are prepared to enter this fight—because that is what it will be. I do not know why they are engaging in a battle which they cannot possibly win. One could argue that they may possibly win in the next 18 months, until the general election. But do they believe that the disadvantaged—and there will be many disadvantaged as a result of the Bill—will rush to the polls to reinstate them at the next election?

Two weeks ago we debated the Social Security Bill, and in that debate we heard speech after speech which clearly demonstrated that many families in this country would be made poorer—the unemployed, single-parent families, the disabled pensioner and the student. Will those people be grateful to the Government? Of course not.

Before I come to the consequences of this legislation, I should like to draw the attention of the House to another group of people who are soon expecting to hear from the Government about their wage claim. The group of low-paid workers to whom I refer are in the National Health Service. It is not only our nurses who deserve a better deal, but the back-up workers in the Health Service—the ancillary workers. I declare an interest as chairman of the National Union of Public Employees' group of sponsored Members of Parliament, but I want to tell the House that we are not just thinking about those low-paid workers under wages council. One can argue that there are many low-paid workers who are in some ways worse off.

For example, a laundry worker in the NHS would receive £72·53 for a 40-hour week. The wages council's statutory minimum for a 39-hour week is £74. The National Health Service rate for a canteen assistant is £72·53 for a 40-hour week. The wages council's statutory minimum for a 39-hour week is £69·11. A domestic supervisor working a 44-hour week, including four hours overtime on a Sunday, would take home £88. I could relate many more of those rates of pay in the Health Service, but I think I would be ruled out of order if I went much further. However, those rates are disgraceful, and they are being made more disgraceful by the Government; and those workers are looking to the Government in the near future to say something positive and encouraging about their wage claim.

I have already described the Bill as a disgrace because it hits at workers who have looked to successive Governments for protection. To be fair, Conservative Governments over the years, from Sir Winston Churchill down to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), have regarded such workers as a worthy group of people in need of protection. When the Minister opened the debate, we heard camouflage, gloss and cant about the Bill. We all know what the Bill is about and I do not see why the Government should disguise it. After all, their leader does not disguise her approach to the poorer workers in this country. If the Prime Minister was trying to disguise it, she has not done a good job with the legislation which has been pouring out recently.

No amount of camouflage could possibly disguise the fact that those under attack by the Government are young people. People under 21 years of age will be bashed by the legislation. The effects are clear. Young people are already among the most disadvantaged in terms of wage rates. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) pointed that out. After today, they can look forward to being the most under-privileged youngsters in the civilised world. As the House already knows, at present one in five of all young people are covered by wages council rates of pay. By introducing the Bill the Government effectively, as the House again knows, contravene International Labour Organisation convention 26. By doing that, the Government strip young workers of the protection afforded to similar workers in competitor countries in Europe. That is another example, as was forcibly demonstrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), of the Government's disregard for international agreements.

We are told by Ministers that this is the price for generating new jobs. All the evidence, despite what was said by the hon. Member for Cornwall, North, suggests that the number of jobs will be very small. Even if the figure is as high as that suggested by the Government, it hardly justifies the removal of basic protection from young workers. The truth is that we are likely to see young workers exploited to the detriment not only of themselves but of many adult workers. That has already been pointed out. Those young people will be taking some of the jobs of their elders as a result of the legislation. In Thatcher's Britain we already see a proportion of male manual workers earning less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold. That has doubled since 1979 from one in 10 to one in five.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South) *rose*—

Mr. Pendry: I would normally love to give way, but I shall not, because the Conservatives are scratching around for speakers. I do not see why I should give them the opportunity of an intervention. I know that some of my hon. Friends have some worthwhile contributions to make. If the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) understands my point, I shall go on.

The proportion of manual workers earning less than the poverty wage has increased from two thirds to four fifths

[Mr. Pendry]

over the period that I have just mentioned. The number of families forced to rely on family income supplement to top up their low wages has trebled since 1979. In fact, a third of our total work force, according to the Council of Europe rate, are low-wage earners.

The reason why the Government will not get away with their low pay arguments from now on is because, thank God, we now have the Low Pay Unit. The House and the nation are gradually beginning to get the message about the facts of low pay. I should like to pay tribute to the work of the Low Pay Unit, especially, being a Greater Manchester Member of Parliament, to the low pay unit run by Steve Carr in Manchester. He is doing a great deal to highlight some of the problems of low pay in that low-wage area, where 25,000 establishments are covered by wages councils and the rates of pay range from between £65 and £78 per week. Even when measured against average full-time earnings of the employed within Greater Manchester, that is very low. I understand that average full-time earnings in Greater Manchester are £160 a week.

I shall give some real examples of low wages. Conservative Members may not know whether similar examples are to be found within their constituencies, but I should be surprised if there are not. A butcher, employed near Stalybridge in my constituency, who is 28 years of age and has two children, receives gross pay of £69 for a 49-hour week. That is the sort of person who will be caught by the Bill.

Another example is Albert — I shall not give his surname — who is 20 years of age. He has worked for one year in a shop at Hyde which sells cut-price household goods. He is the only member of a large family who is employed. He takes home £48 for a 48-hour week. It has been calculated that he is under-paid by 45p an hour and is owed over £800 in lost wages. The effect of the Bill, when enacted, would be to remove employees such as Albert from the scope of wages councils orders. A claim for under-payment could be made only if he were one year older.

Another example from my constituency involves a person who is a carpet fitter by trade. He was employed until Christmas by a small Tameside firm which employs 15 workers. When he was made redundant, he contacted the Greater Manchester low pay unit about obtaining redundancy pay. The result of the unit's efforts was that my constituent was able to secure a redundancy rebate of 35 per cent. That would not be open to him under the Bill.

I have given only three of many examples that I could present to the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, who is to reply to the debate. The Minister, who represents a north-west constituency, must be aware of the problems to which I am drawing the attention of the House. I am sure that when he replies he will give us his in-depth knowledge of what he has learnt from moving around the area. I know that his constituents will be taking an interest in the debate.

It is unfortunate that I do not have the Minister's attention, but I hope that he will tell us, when he replies, how he proposes to strengthen the wages councils for those who are over 21 years of age. Will he strengthen the factory inspectorate? Will he ensure that the 43 per cent. of employers in Greater Manchester who were illegally under-paying their employees in 1984 will be prosecuted? Will he ensure that it will not take 19 years on average for those making illegal payments to be prosecuted? Will he give us a guarantee that wages councils will be beefed up to deal with injustices? The Minister must come clean when he replies. He must understand that there are many who believe that the wages councils should be more effective in future than they are now.

The low-paid and other disadvantaged groups do not have sophisticated channels of communication. They do not have plush public relations companies and they cannot present their case in the newsapers. However, they have their unions, low pay units and Labour Members, and, most of all, they have their votes. That is why the Bill will be rubbished after the next general election. They will make their complaints through the ballot box about the sort of legislation that is now pouring out from the Government. Let us hope that the Government will take note of what has been happening to the Shops Bill in another place and in Committee will produce a Bill that will not be recognised as the measure that is now before us. We shall give the Government every assistance in Committee if they wish to produce a measure that will meet the country's needs, and especially those of young workers.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Front Bench replies are expected to begin at about 9.20 pm and six Back Benchers still hope to contribute to the debate. I hope that contributions will be brief.

8.14 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): The contributions to the debate by Conservative Members have been divorced from what is happening in industries in which the low-paid are employed. The most despicable feature of the debate is the way in which the Government have tried to shift their responsibility for the mismanagement of the economy over a considerable period from themselves to the backs of low-paid workers. When industrialists talk about their problems they do not refer to wage levels. Instead, they talk about high interest charges and the manner in which the Government have prevented capital investment in British industry.

The Bill is asking the low-paid to pay for the mismanagement of the economy by the present Administration. There are many who are concerned about the low-paid, and many of the concerned are in the inner cities. I shall refer to three main areas of concern and then deal with the consultation document and the Bill. In doing so, I shall address myself to whether they have been able to advance their case.

There are many who are concerned about the reform of the wages councils, because it is recognised that in many instances the councils provide base lines for wages. The base lines are the products of discussions within individual industries. The Bill will lead to rolling in by the state and we shall not see the rolling back of intervention. Without legal minima, many of my constituents will be reduced to poverty wages. I represent an inner-city constituency which faces horrific problems, and the Bill will compound the problems.

The effect of poverty wages is apparent not merely to those who receive them. There are consequences for the local economy, as low wages reduce considerably the purchasing power of those within the local economy. The Government are trying to provide resources through their

cosmetic schemes for the inner cities, but at the same time they are withdrawing resources which could well be produced by ensuring proper wage levels for those in the inner cities.

After detailed consideration of the consultation paper and the Bill, it appears that it is the Government's fundamental premise that decreasing wages will significantly increase employment. I believe that that is a flawed premise. The Paymaster General argued that wages councils present an obstacle to the creation of more jobs and the freedom of employers to offer, and job seekers to accept, jobs which otherwise would be acceptable. The much-quoted department of applied economics of Cambridge university concluded that where wages councils have been abolished there have been no consequential benefits for those seeking employment. It found no evidence of any increase in economic efficiency and no increase in the number of jobs in the industry or industries that had been subject to wages council control. Indeed, it found significant evidence of an increase in low pay.

The Paymaster General questioned the usefulness of wages councils in the light of changes in rates of pay, employment legislation, social security and welfare provision. Rates of pay for those at the bottom end of the pay scale have not improved. Between 1973 and 1984 the earnings of full-time male workers within the lowest earnings band declined from 65·6 to 61·6 per cent. of those in higher paid employment. During the same period, many higher paid workers' earnings increased considerably. Many low-paid workers have suffered a significant decline in real earnings, while prices have risen, by between 5 and 6 per cent. per annum. The full protection that is offered to some by employment protection legislation does not extend to employees in small firms, and workers who are covered by wages councils are employed in many such firms. The poverty wages that will result from the abolition or reform of wages councils will force many of the workers involved to become dependent on the state.

Mr. Baldry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Caborn: No, because Mr. Deputy Speaker has reminded the House that many other hon. Members wish to take part in this debate.

The consultative document states that employment in wages councils' industries is atypical, with two thirds of them being part-time workers and four fifths of them female. The implication is that these workers are less important and that their incomes are less crucial than those of other workers. However, many female workers are the sole breadwinners in the family and rely upon their full-time or part-time earnings to provide the crucial family income. Well over four times as many families would be below the poverty line without women's earnings in one form or another. Reform of the wages councils will have a particularly adverse effect upon such workers.

The suggestion that compliance with wages councils orders is higher than non-compliance is due to a misunderstanding. In 1983, 9,842 establishments were found to be breaking the law, but only two were prosecuted. Instead of clamping down on this criminal activity, the Government have weakened the enforcement machinery. Since 1979 the number of inspectors has been cut by one third to 119. Firms can now expect to be visited once every 19 years. However, in 1984 one third of the establishments that were visited were found to be underpaying 18,000 workers; 15 per cent. of those whose pay was inspected were found to be underpaid.

Statements have been made, without supporting documents, that a number of studies suppon the view that statutory minimum rates of pay jeopardise employment. Since 1977 the number of low-paid workers has increased. Unemployment has also increased dramatically. The suggestion that further cuts in wages would reverse this trend is unsupported. The evidence from other countries, particularly Japan, suggests that increases in the number of jobs have paralleled rises in wages.

The consultative document referred to the Treasury's paper entitled "The Relationship Between Employment and Wages." It claimed that a 1 per cent. increase in average real wages resulted in the loss of 150,000 to 200,000 jobs, yet wages councils account for only 8 per cent. of the total hourly wages bill, and for even less of the total weekly wages bill. The abolition or reform of the wages councils would result in a massive fall in wages. Is that what the Government want? This information was fed into the computer by the Low Pay Unit, using the Treasury model, and it showed that in the five years following abolition or reform only 8,000 jobs would be created, which is less than half the increase in unemployment in most months. It is suggested that trades covered by wages councils offer rates of pay for young people that are higher than most employers are willing to pay. Great emphasis has been laid by Conservative Members on this suggestion.

However, since 1979 the wages of young workers have fallen sharply, compared with adult rates of pay. They represent a cut of 4 per cent. in real earnings. In 1984 young workers under the age of 18 received an average, excluding YTS, of 37 per cent. of the average adult wage. In 1981 the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior), who was then the Secretary of State for Employment, said that the exclusion of young people and part-timers from the scope of the wages councils

"would be unlikely to lead to more than a very marginal increase in job opportunities in these categories."

There seems to have been a significant shift in thinking, based upon the evidence that was available then to the Department of Employment. To remove young people from the scope of wages councils will probably lead to lower-paid young people displacing adult workers, especially women and ethnic minority workers. There is even concern on the Conservative Benches that this might happen.

Angela Galvin, who works in Sheffield's low pay unit, said:

"We have been talking to young people in Sheffield who are working 10-hour days, often without a proper break, for as little as £1·20 an hour. The proposals would remove what little protection they have and cause enormous problems for adult workers. You don't need a degree in economics to realise that the employers will not hire adults if they can employ young people for a pittance."

That point has been clearly demonstrated in this debate. There is concern, even on the Conservative Benches, about the fact that 18, 19 and 20-year-olds who have had a modicum of training will be in a position to displace workers who are 21 years of age, or older.

It has also been suggested that wages councils impose considerable burdens upon employers. A recently published Department of Employment paper entitled "Burdens on Business" states that research found that only

[Mr. Caborn]

4 per cent. of employers mentioned wages councils as having a detrimental effect upon business. The department of applied economics at Cambridge stated:

"Unregulated low wage employment destabilises product markets, increases uncertainty and risk, slows down the rate of scrapping of outdated equipment and consequently reduces both the level of new investment and the profitability of new investment in high wage firms."

Many firms fear the effects of undercutting leading not only to shoddy work but to forcing firms out of business. The Contract Cleaners and Maintenance Association fear these effects and have pledged themselves not to undercut minimum NHS wage rates and conditions in Health Service contracts.

The Bill fits clearly into the Government's overall strategy for wage earners: to force down and depress wages in order to create a low-wage economy. This is to be seen in many facets of the Government's policy, whether it be the youth training scheme, or wages Bills or their attitude to industry. The Government are now attacking the lowest paid in our society.

I end with a quotation from Winston Churchill:

"It is a serious national evil that any class of His Majesty's subjects should receive less than a living wage in return for their utmost exertions. It was formerly supposed that the working of the laws of supply and demand would naturally regulate or eliminate the evil. . . . But where you have . . . no organisation, no parity of bargaining, the good employer is undercut by the bad, and the bad employer is undercut by the worst."—[*Official Report*, 28 April 1909; Vol. IV, c. 388.]

Those words are as relevant today as they were when wages councils were established all those many years ago.

8.27 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I wish to deal with two aspects of the Bill: first, the Truck Acts and their effect during the past century and, secondly, the general principle of pricing people into work.

The Truck Acts legislation has undoubtedly hampered the growth of all non-cash methods of wage payment. It has acted as an impediment to efficiency in British industry. Moreover, it is inconsistent with the well-established principle that terms and conditions of employment are essentially matters to be determined contractually between workers and management rather than by legislation.

The main body of the Truck Acts legislation, which comprises the four Truck Acts of 1831 to 1940 and a number of ancillary and related provisions in other Acts, was passed in the 19th century to protect manual workers from abuses associated with the payment of wages. When I listen to Opposition Members, I feel that they are still living in the 19th century. They believe that such abuses still take place. We know what some of those abuses were. The bosses, the evil capitalists, had their factory shops. Rather than pay wages to their workers, they gave them tokens that had to be spent on the grossly over-priced goods in their factory shops.

The Truck Acts, which stipulated that workers should be paid in cash, formed one of the most valuable pieces of legislation to prevent that flagrant and disgusting abuse. There is no reason to suppose that if we abolished the Truck Acts we should suddenly find that 25 million workers in this country would revert to a form of token payment or to taking payment in kind instead of insisting on cash: cash through the credit transfer system, and cash through the cheque system. We are talking about money. The workers will still receive money rather than payments in kind. In 1983 the Government suggested that they would repeal this outdated legislation. The Bill will certainly undertake that long overdue task.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) cited some statistics. A much higher proportion of the working population in other countries are commonly paid through methods other than a wage packet on a Thursday night. In the United States, a much larger percentage of the population have bank accounts and use credit transfer systems. Only 1 per cent. of wage payments are made in cash. In Germany, only about 5 per cent. of wage payments are made in cash. In 1984, mainly because of the attitudes of trade unions, which were vested in the last century, 37 per cent. of wage payments in Britain were made in cash.

Can any hon. Member put up a sensible non-emotional argument on why we must have wages paid in cash in a wage packet? What is so philosophically sound or morally justifiable about a person going home with an average weekly wage of £100, £160 or £300 in cash? What is so morally wrong about transferring that cash through a credit transfer system to the bank? I would gladly listen to any hon. Member who could put up such an argument.

Ms. Clare Short: The Labour party's argument is that it should be up to the workers to negotiate. There are advantages to employers in moving to cashless pay. No one is against that, but employers should meet the wishes of their employees. This measure takes away the need for the workers to agree to the change. We believe in freedom of choice for the work force.

Mr. Maclean: That argument is rather rich. It gives those trade unions that control the work force of 9 million people a complete bar. If a large number of the workers want a credit transfer system, it will not be possible for them to get such a system. This legislation will not compel people to be paid by cheque. I accept that the change should result from freedom of choice. I know of industries where the workers have had to go behind the backs of their union bosses to get a credit transfer system. They negotiated for an extra few days pay with the management to allow them to move to a credit transfer system. They now all like that system.

There is no doubt that, on efficiency grounds, the credit transfer system is infinitely preferable to paying in cash. A tremendous cash saving can be made from paying people through credit transfers. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) suggests that we should not have this system, but I suggest that she should put it to the Sevices Committee that the House should set an example. Perhaps more people would then attend the Chamber late on a Thursday night as hon. Members queued up at the Vote Office to collect their little cash packets.

Ms. Clare Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way, because he is misleading the House?

Mr. Maclean: I shall not give way on this occasion. Contrary to Opposition Members, who seem never to give way, Conservative Members give way occasionally. I have given way once to the hon. Lady. I may give way later if she comes up with a reasonable point.

My main point is on fighting crime. I do not like the way the Opposition have glossed over the fact that in 1984

there were 450 reported armed robberies from factories and offices or on public highways in England and Wales. I declare an interest, because I worked for a security company which was, and still is, involved in the transfer of large amounts of cash. The Opposition quote examples of low pay in their constituencies. I can quote examples from the time when I was involved in cash deliveries. As a training officer, I dealt with the maimed and injured people who came to my classroom because they had been shot or otherwise injured during armed robberies. Too many women are widows because their husbands were engaged in cash transit work and were killed during robberies.

Unfortunately, the number of armed robberies against cash transit firms is increasing. This does not occur with just the large and well protected firms. There are too many robberies of office girls carrying the cash down to the bank in carrier bags or suitcases. It cannot be right in a modern sophisticated age to entrust the collection of wages to people who have to walk to the banks with carrier bags and suitcases for the cash. It is high time the Truck Acts were repealed.

The core of the Bill is about the removal of young workers from the wages council system. There is no doubt that high wages for young people choke off training opportunities and reduce employment opportunities for young people, because employers are not willing to employ youngsters on the pay that they are forced to give adult workers. There is no harm in again citing the statistics. In West Germany, apprentices earn between 15 and 25 per cent. of the adult rate. In the United Kingdom, they earn between 50 and 60 per cent. of the adult rate. In wages council trades, the basic rate paid to 16-year-olds is 65 per cent. of the adult rate, and for 17-year-olds it is 75 per cent. Most wages councils require the full adult rate to be paid at 18 or 19. When my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North said that young workers were paid 50 or 60 per cent., he was asked, "Fifty or 60 per cent. of what?". That is largely irrelevant.

Ms. Clare Short: Not if one is trying to pay the rent.

Mr. Maclean: It is not irrelevant to the young people who cannot get jobs. We have heard much talk from the Opposition about defending the low-paid, but they must decide about whom they are really concerned—the 25 million people who have a job, or the 3·5 million people who are not in work?

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Both.

Mr. Maclean: If the Opposition were genuinely concerned about both, the hon. Gentleman would not attempt to support a measure which would freeze out a minimum of 8,000 workers and possibly 250,000 workers, and prevent them from getting a job.

There is no doubt that reducing relative wage levels for young people to a rate that reflects their inexperience and the value of their contribution can have a startling effect. The EETPU—the hon. Member for Ladywood said that Conservative Members could not quote any other examples——

Ms. Clare Short: It is true.

Mr. Maclean: I cannot quote any other examples because all the other trade unions have exercised such a tight grip over their workers and over management that they have not allowed an agreement similar to the electricians' agreement to be negotiated. If more trade union leaders had the guts of those in the electricians' trade union, there would be a darned sight more agreements such as that negotiated by the EETPU.

The May 1985 study by the Department of Employment on the effect of wage minima in the clothing industry suggested that up to 50,000 jobs had been lost between 1954 and 1979 because of wages councils. If there was a possibility of a factory closing this week, resulting in the loss of 50,000 jobs, would there not be applications under Standing Order No. 10, and would not the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) be dropping in with more points of order to raise after he had primed his press men to wait in the Press Gallery? If 50,000 jobs are lost through the actions of trade unions, we hear not a cheep from the Opposition.

In July 1985, in an article in *Economic Affairs*, Dr. Stanley Siebert estimated that an extra 250,000 jobs for young people would follow the removal of the effects of wages councils. The most pessimistic study mentioned by the Opposition suggests that a minimum number of jobs —only 8,000 extra—might be created if wages councils were abolished. I like that humbug! If it were a question of the Government dismissing 8,000 employees, or of 8,000 jobs being lost, would we hear these sob stories from the Opposition? When there is a possibility of 8,000 new jobs as a minimum, with a possibility of 250,000 new jobs, being created, there is not a cheep from the Opposition.

What do the young people want? We have heard constituency examples of what might happen to young people in employment, but we have heard nothing about the young unemployed. In July 1985, a Gallup poll showed that eight out of 10 of the young people interviewed said that they would prefer low pay to start with rather than have no job at all.

I can understand why the Labour party does not understand the principle of pricing young people into a job. It is anathema to them. They never had to consider the matter while the trade unions ruled the country. I can understand why Labour does not understand it. The employers had no say in those jobs in the trade unions which came about through patronage and nepotism. They had no say in the jobs in the mines, in the shipyards in SOGAT, in the NGA and in all those jobs which were handed down from father to son. They had no say in the jobs for the boys in the trade union movement, about which Labour Members are so pleased. They do not understand the concept of pricing into a job, and they do not particularly like it.

Many of us have priced ourselves into a job. I trained as a lawyer, but I did not try to step into a highly paid job in middle management. I priced myself into a job and started at £40 a week in 1975, and that was not a particularly high wage then.

What the Opposition do not like about this concept is that it brings in a spirit of independence. They would like every person to have to depend on employment, to be employed by someone else. They want to stop at national trade rates which are dictated by the unions. Labour Members dislike the philosophy of the Bill.

I must say to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) that I shall not take a lesson in wages morality from him. Conservative Members are accused of paying more for a lunch than a young worker is paid during a week, or during a day. I find that rather insulting as someone who is the

[Mr. Maclean]

son of a tenant farmer, brought up in the highlands of Scotland in the 1950s. I do not think there were many expense account lunches going for them or for Conservative Members.

The hon. Gentleman is still living in the days of class warfare. He likes to believe that Members on the Labour Benches represent working-class lads and are working for the low-paid and for the unemployed. It sticks in the craw of Labour Members when they see a Conservative Member — such as my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) — representing a mining area. They cannot understand it. A situation in which individuals can take a low-paid job to begin with, and through their own efforts and hard work rise to the top and command much higher salaries, or break out of the employee-employer mentality and go into business for themselves, is anathema to Labour Members. They dislike it intensely, and that is at the core of their resistance to this measure, because it gives independence to young people to go out and seek a job at a lower rate than the minima which Labour Members would like to insist that everyone should have.

My hon. Friend who is to wind up the debate was in Penrith recently to present awards and a cheque at one of our super new hotels in the area. Penrith business men say to me, "Look, we appreciate what you have done so far and the fact that you are trying to reduce the burdens on industry. You have abolished Labour's iniquitous national insurance surcharge. You are changing the national insurance rules. You are trying to help us, but please make it easier to get young people into employment. We want to employ young people and take on young workers, but there is no way that we will pay them grossly inflated wages for the first few years when they cannot sell that equivalent amount in goods." A man in a shoe shop said to me, "I would happily take on a worker tomorrow, provided that I could pay him a lower rate than the standard norm which the wages council imposes, because in the first year he will not be able to sell £50 worth of shoes."

There is one other statistic that I want to give from Penrith. It has been said tonight that low pay brings with it areas of high unemployment. One of the growth areas in my constituency is taking businesses which have given up in other parts of the country, particularly Liverpool, where the attitude to industrial relations is not conducive to success. Penrith has 11·2 per cent. unemployment, and I do not think that Labour Members would say that we are a high wage area. We are a relatively low wage area in Cumbria, yet we still have only 11·2 per cent. unemployment, and the reason has nothing to do with wages councils. It is to do with the fact that we are the 12th highest constituency in the United Kingdom for small businesses and private enterprise, for people breaking out on their own and setting up businesses.

There is one superb example which I see every couple of weeks. Last Easter, a young man knocked on my door. He said that he was leaving school during the summer months and wanted to set up a window cleaning business. He was going around collecting potential customers, and he has now set up in business for himself. He has not sat back and listened to the whines from the Opposition that we cannot create more jobs; that young people are accepting wages that are below a magic norm which they would like to see paid. That young man has priced himself into work. The Bill will allow thousands of others to price themselves into work, and it ought to be accepted and passed.

8.45 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Because of the shortness of time I shall not deal with part I or part III of the Bill. I want to concentrate instead on the position of young workers under part II.

About five days ago I described this Cabinet as being like a headless chicken running around in its death throes. After Westland and the "Brittangate" scandal, and Austin Rover and so on, that was perhaps an acceptable description.

But there is nothing aimless about tonight's Bill. It is a squalid measure deliberately aimed at half a million young workers in this country. Where are the Tory protesters, who one would have believed in recent weeks were bursting out all over the Tory party? Where are these "One-Nation" people from the weekend protesting about standards of low pay in this country? There has not been one genuine speech from the Tory Benches today defending the position of young unemployed or young low-paid workers. The fact is, of course, that we have not one nation but two. While young workers earn £30, £40 and £50 a week, the Government have a Cabinet Secretary on £1,500 a week. We have a Government who preside over an economy in which 26 companies have directors earning over £150,000 a year. Top of the tree is Richard Giordano, managing director of British Oxygen, who gets £15,000 a week for selling fresh air. Even that is dwarfed by the hon. Member for Brighton, Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) and the other two members of his family who run that little grocery store — Sainsbury's — and who between them own £808 million-worth of shares and take home £150,000 a week.

It would take somebody covered by one of these wages councils over a century to earn what these three individuals get in a week, yet we are told that it is one nation. Incidentally, the other member of the family is the treasurer of the SDP; they do not get out of it scot-free.

We are told that there is a split in the Tory party over the future for Britain. There is a little disagreement between the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). It is like the difference between the iron fist and the velvet glove. When the Government come with this Bill to mug young workers and nick their wage packets, those young workers will not be too worried whether or not the hand that nicked the money is wearing a glove, unless the Government intend to cover up the fingerprints and conceal who is taking the money away from them.

The instrument of renunciation which announced that the Bill was going to be introduced was published in July. Tory Members said how wonderful the youth of this country were who had just raised £50 million the previous weekend in the Live Aid concert, yet three days later, on the Wednesday, they castigated precisely the same young people for pricing themselves, their friends and their neighbours, out of work. Twenty-four hours later, the Government said that, in order to have an incentive to get the right people in the job, they needed wage rises of 30, 40 or 50 per cent. for 2,000 generals, top civil servants, judges and so on.

When Ministers are told that it is rubbish that low pay and high employment go hand in hand, they are reluctant to give straight answers. During the past few years, the number of wages councils has fallen from 61 to 26. What has happened to pay and employment in sectors where wages councils have disappeared? If that were examined, one would find dramatic falls in both employment and wages. "Why look in a crystal ball when one can read the book" on the effects of the abolition of these councils?

Since 1979 when the Prime Minister walked into 10 Downing street, school leavers' wages have fallen, relative to adult wages, by 12 per cent. for boys and 13 per cent. for girls. During the same period, youth unemployment has trebled. Youth wages have been driven down, but jobs have not been created. Yet the Government say that young people must be priced into jobs, and that if only they would accept low wages, employers would recruit them rather than skilled adults. The Department of Employment's statistics show that eight out of 10 jobs, which were supposedly created by the young workers scheme and other forms of subsidy and wage cutting, are job substitution. Older workers are being driven out of jobs. The Government are merely shifting unemployment up and down the age spectrum and around the country. No real new jobs are being created.

The wages councils have existed for 75 years. About 500,000 workers will be affected by the fact that wages councils are no longer to apply to those aged under 21. The rates of pay range from £32 for 16-year-olds to £78 for 21-year-olds. I have received dozens of letters from young workers, mainly young women, since I introduced a national minimum wage Bill which called, in today's money, for £120 for a 35-hour week as a national minimum wage, below which no 18-year-old should be allowed to fall.

A lass in Hounslow in Middlesex who is a dental assistant wrote:

"My boss says says he can't afford to give me a rise, which I think is stupid—he has a Rolls Royce. Last year I said to him I was looking for another job. He said 'OK! Find another job then. There's 3,000 people on the dole in this area. I can easily get another little junior.'"

That shows how wages have been driven down, and how employers, encouraged by the Government, use mass unemployment to cow workers and their trade union organisations into accepting poor working conditions.

A 19-year-old office worker in Wolverhampton wrote:

"When I was doing my training, I was on £30 a week. Now I'm kept on permanently, I get £32·50 a week. As I am 19, I do not think that this is a good wage. I will not ask for a pay rise as they will only give me the sack."

The fear of unemployment is used to keep young workers on poverty wages.

A 17-year-old office worker in York tells me that she is nearly 18 and is receiving take-home pay of £41 a week. She attends night classes twice a week on her own accord, and works hard because she realises that that is the only way to get on. At 18 she should be entitled to a good rise, but she was disgusted to find out that £65·70 a week was the amount to which she was legally entitled. She doubts if she could even get an increase to that level. All she wants to be content is to go home after a good day's work, having earned a decent wage for that day's work. If the measure is passed, there will be no contentment for 500,000 workers.

During the past six years the Government have cut the YTS allowance by £14 a week. If it had increased according to earnings or inflation it would be £40 a week, but it is £27. That follows the prediction of Sir John Hoskyns who was a member of the Cabinet's Think Tank and adviser to the Prime Minister. He drafted the original YTS, and said that its aim was to increase the differential between youth and adult wages. Add to that the Government's new legislation, such as preventing claims against unfair dismissal until a person has worked for two years for the same employer, and one sees that the measure seeks to produce a conveyor belt of school leavers. They will get on it aged 16 at £27·30. After two years YTS they will enter a job for which there is either no minimum legal requirement for a wage or for which the general level of wages has been driven down to between £30 and £40. Before two years is up, when they could claim unfair dismissal and receive the full adult rate at 21, they can be chucked out on their ear. Then there are supplementary benefit cuts to ensure that they have no incentive to go on the dole to escape poverty wages.

Tory Members often argue that the gap between wages and benefits is not big enough. First they cut the benefits, and now they seek to cut wages. Next, they will cut more benefits. The Government are always trying to drive down those levels so that they can hand out more tax cuts to the top 5 per cent. Despite their arguments, unemployment climbs relentlessly. Despite getting rid of earnings-related benefit and other meagre protections to the unemployed, they cannot explain why in the 1960s, when the gap was smaller between the wages of those in work and the benefits of those who had lost a job, unemployment was less than a tenth of its present level.

Several Tory Members, especially the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), mentioned the Henry Neuberger story about 8,000 jobs being created within five years if wages councils were substantially reformed. What do 8,000 jobs in five years mean? They mean 2·2 jobs per year per constituency. More than 7,000 people are unemployed in my constituency. Are the Government saying that I must tell about 2,500 young workers in my constituency that they must accept wage cuts, so that we can create 2·2 new jobs a year in the constituency? If the position were not so serious, that would be ridiculous and laughable.

People are unemployed because there are no jobs, and because £50,000 million has left the country during the past five years for South Africa, Brazil, Korea, Argentina and other countries where wage rates are deliberately kept low at the barrel of a gun, and where unions are illegal. That is what the Government want in this country. They want Bangledesh wages in Britain, British workers to be the coolies of western Europe, and trade unions to have the same restrictions that the Government admire in Brazil, South Africa and Poland.

We want real jobs. Last summer 5,000 youngsters left school in Coventry. One in eight of them got a job, totalling 675. One hundred and eighty-nine youngsters left special schools for the mentally and physically handicapped. Two years ago, only two found a job, but this year we had a big increase of three, as five found a real job. What good is it to mentally and physically handicapped kids, who usually end up in unskilled or partly skilled jobs, to see cuts in their wage rates? Will that get their friends jobs? Absolutely not.

One firm, GEC, had 1,000 redundancies in Coventry before Christmas. Lord Weinstock is involved. Was that because of high wages or a lack of money? GEC has

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

£1,400 million liquid cash in the bank, so it cannot tell me that it cannot invest in Coventry and provide jobs. In the west midlands, 50,000 young workers will lose protection because of the Bill. For the remaining workers, paid holidays, weekend and shift premiums, overtime, and skill differentials will go. Between 6,000 and 8,000 young workers will lose all protection in Coventry.

I am not speaking merely to defend wages councils, although I shall vote to defend them. They are inadequate because the Tory Government have tried to make them inadequate. They have cut £2·5 million from the budget, and one third of the inspectors. In the west midlands the average inspection rate of a factory is once every 16 years. In the west midlands, 300 employers were found to be underpaying workers last year but not one of them was prosecuted. The Government have cut the mileage allowance for the inspectors and some inspectors run out of petrol in August. They spend September, October, November and December locked in the office because they cannot get their cars on the road to investigate factories.

In the face of all that, the Government call themselves a Government of law and order. Last year, 11,000 miners were found guilty of breaking the law. Some 600 were sacked and 200 were put in prison. Over the same period, 9,500 employers were found guilty of breaking the law but only two were prosecuted and were fined £107 each. Since 1981, 18 employers have been prosecuted out of the 30,000 or 40,000 who have been found guilty. So according to the Tories the working classes must abide by the law but the Government's friends in industry change the law to avoid having to observe it.

The level of unemployment in this country has nothing to do with wages. It has everything to do with the inability of the capitalist system to provide jobs for working people. I asked why the lowest unemployment was not in India and the highest not in Sweden, if high wages caused high unemployment. Why has unemployment dramatically increased over the past six or seven years? The answer is simple. It is due to the refusal of those who own and control wealth to invest in manufacturing industry in this country.

I have quoted a figure of £50,000 million but I have a better statistic than that. The leading banks estimate that the current gap between investment in British manufacturing industry and that of Europe, Japan and America has opened up to £200,000 million. That is 35 to 40 times the sum invested each year in the factories. Unemployment has nothing to do with wages in hotels, shops, and the clothing and catering trades. It is due to lack of investment. That is why British industry has lost its world markets. It controlled a third of the world markets in the 1950s, but now its share is down to 6 per cent. Not only has it lost the world markets; it has lost domestic markets as well. We should look at the level of our imports of fridges, motor bikes, cars, electronics and those in all the other sectors of the economy. We used to call this country the workshop of the world; now it is the warehouse of the world because of the lack of investment in manufacturing industry.

The problem is not caused merely by a lack of money. In the three years from 1981 to 1984, the top 51 companies in this country had a 77 per cent. rise in profits. Several of those companies have Tory Members on their boards of directors. Those companies saw their profits rise at twice the speed of their turnover. In other words, they increased exploitation of their workers and pushed down their workers' wages.

There are two nations in this country and the Bill is designed to exacerbate that position. A million people earn more than £20,000 a year and 8,000 of them are millionaires. That latter figure has doubled under the Tory Government, yet there are 9 million people living on poverty wages. In the face of that, how can we talk about creating jobs when some Tory Members are earning £350 a week, and there are some who have not just one job, but three or even five jobs? In fact, the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) has 32 jobs apart from being a Member of Parliament. In 29 of those he is the chairman of the company concerned. How many people is the right hon. and learned Gentleman putting out of work? How can Tory hon. Members understand what it is like to live on £40 or £50 a week?

The Government are doing nothing for youth unemployment. Last year, 517,000 youngsters left school to chase 12,355 vacancies. The chances of a school leaver getting a job in England is 39 to one. In Wales the chance is 129 to one and in Scotland 144 to one. There were 51 careers offices without one vacancy. A further 36 careers offices had only one job each on offer. How will cutting the wages of kids on £35, £40 or £45 a week increase the jobs on offer in careers offices? To get those jobs, the first thing that we must do is get rid of those on the Treasury Bench and ensure the return of a Labour Government prepared to take the economy into public ownership, plan the economy and give the workers rights and a say in how that economy is run.

I began by describing the Bill as squalid. I end in a similar vein. It is because youth unemployment has trebled under the Government that we need greater protection for those youngsters in work. Since 1979, under this Prime Minister, 500,000 school leavers have never had a day's work. The protection of their friends who have jobs and the wages which they presently enjoy—if I may use that word—ought to be a matter of urgency for the House.

If the Bill is passed and the wages council protection for young workers disappears, there is only one route left for those young people. The trade unions—the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers Union, the Transport and General Workers Union, and the National Union of Public Employees—must ensure in the next six months a massive recruitment campaign among young workers so that we can have a strong labour and trade union movement constructed around youth.

Those young workers who may read the report of this debate should not despair, despite seven years of the Tory Government. Those workers should be involved in constructive vandalism. They should tear apart the Tory capitalist economy brick by brick and replace it with an economy in which the workers who create the wealth have a say in how that wealth is distributed and where ownership is vested in working people. Then the low pay in which this Tory Government revel and want to make worse can be put into the dustbin of history for ever.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the Front Bench speakers wish to rise at 9.20 pm. Three hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. If they were to take five minutes each, I should be able to call them all.

9.4 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I wish to comment on three aspects of the Bill —wages councils, small firms and payments other than in cash.

Before coming to the House, I was employed as a manager in the clothing industry. Our problem was the shortage of skilled workers and the cost of training. The company was always in advance of anything that the wages council recommended, particularly at the skilled end of the wage scale. It therefore puzzles me why the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) should challenge the clause defining an adult skilled worker as someone of the age of 21. I cannot see the logic of arguing that that will mean young people entering the industry and pushing out adults when, in the same breath, the hon. Gentleman said that when they finished their first few years of work and reached the age of 21, they would be dismissed. That is illogical.

When we had questions on this subject some months ago, I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment whether he would allow industries to choose a mechanism that would establish a definition for an adult skilled worker in that industry instead of the Government choosing the age of 21.

A number of hon. Gentlemen have referred to the problem faced by young people entering an industry. Let us take as an example someone aged 19. He may have been away from school for three years. He may have been in retailing, done unskilled work or been out of work. That person may suddenly have the opportunity of moving into an industry that requires skills. Under present legislation, there is no way in which a manufacturing company which primarily requires skilled workers can take on that 19-year-old. Under the existing regulations, the company would have to pay that young man the full skilled wage because, according to the book, he would have been in employment for three years. He would have to be paid the full adult rate. It would therefore turn him away. I know that to be the case.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is always keen to defend the rights of women workers. The problem that I have described applies to the textile industry. It is even worse when a woman is involved. A woman may have married young, had a family and want to return to work. Because she is over 21, she cannot go into the textile manufacturing industry, because present constraints require that she be paid the full adult rate although she can contribute nothing.

I accept that research has resulted in the age of 21 being chosen. I should have preferred the textile industry to be able to say that someone was an adult worker when he or she could show three years' employment within the industry. That would have answered the problem.

I believe that the description "small firm" still causes confusion. The technical description of a small firm is one that employs fewer than 200 people. The Bill addresses itself to deregulation—if I may use that phrase—for firms employing fewer than 10 people.

In the bus legislation we use the terms "large bus" and "little bus". I wish that we could incorporate into legislation the term "little firm", so that we would know that we were discussing firms employing fewer than 10 rather than the term "small firm", which is the usual off-the-cuff description of firms employing fewer than 200 workers.

Those hon. Members who have never sought to run a business, however small, cannot imagine the hassle and disincentive of a rule book a mile long to someone who seeks to create employment. Anything that we can do to remove regulations and paperwork from the little firm must help employment.

I endorse the logical and clear arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) in favour of trying to do away as much as possible with the transfer of cash. For many years it was always a source of great worry to me, as the factory manager, to send our senior clerk with an assistant to the bank to collect the wages for more than 200 staff. We tried all the mechanisms, such as going at different times or making the trip on different days. That brought about the problem of storing large sums of money overnight in a safe, which in turn brought insurance problems. We happily changed to security vans, which make runs at the same time and on the same day, but the House is well aware of the tragedies that have happened to security vans.

If we can move towards the techniques of other sophisticated countries, where staff are paid by cheque or credit transfer, we shall have moved sensibly in the right direction and made at least a step towards abolishing one form of crime — the weekly attacks on people who collect wages in cash.

9.11 pm

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): It is often said in the House that the best speeches are the ones that are never made. I am afraid that that is applicable to me this evening.

In the few moments available to me I wish to put some facts on the record. I am most interested in the part of the Bill that relates to wages councils. I could not get as excited as the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) about the Truck Acts, and I have no intention of getting involved in that aspect.

The wages councils cover almost 3 million workers. The main industries covered by the councils, which have not been fully discussed, are hotel and catering, retailing, and textiles and clothing. Of the workers covered by the wages councils, four fifths are women, about 2 million people; two thirds are part-time workers, about 2 million; one fifth are young workers, about 500,000; and one tenth are home workers—of whom many are disabled—and they represent about 330,000 people. The Bill takes vicious sanctions against those people.

The wages councils set minimum wage rates and other terms and conditions of employment such as holidays, but the proposals in the Bill will remove all under-21s from wages councils regulations, restrict wages councils to setting a single rate of pay, introduce new powers for the Secretary of State to modify or abolish individual councils and to deratify ILO convention 26 on low pay.

The main effects of the proposals will be that young workers' wages will be forced down to the YTS level of less than £30 a week. Adult workers will be replaced by cheap workers aged under 21, and that will hit women workers especially hard. Many workers will lose their legal right to annual holidays. It is worth repeating that Britain is the only EC country that does not provide legal holiday entitlement for all workers.

[Mr. Robert C. Brown]

It is a scandal that, of the 21 democracies that form the Council of Europe, Britain stands out like a sore thumb. There was a time when hon. Members like myself who are members of the Council of Europe could travel to Strasbourg with heads held high and with pride in our country, but now the finger is pointed at us. It is galling to hear Members of Parliament from countries such as Turkey talking about the British Government treading on human rights. I no longer go to Strasbourg with great pride, because at every Council session members quote the decision on Cheltenham, the repression of trade unions and convention 3632. The next time we go to Strasbourg, they will be accusing us over ILO convention 26.

9.15 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Brown) for allowing me five minutes to speak in the debate. I was amazed by the way in which the Paymaster General bounced into the Chamber this afternoon and spoke with so much enthusiasm for the legislation, yet found it so difficult to drum up support among Conservative Members. For long periods, few Conservative Members were present, and there was a lack of support for his enthusiasm.

Other hon. Members have listed the problems that will beset youngsters. Yesterday, we had a debate about young people in training, and hon. Members on both sides of the House expressed anxiety about getting youngsters into work. The Bill will not get people into work; I am surprised that so few Conservative Members realise the problems of 17 and 18-year-olds in their constituencies, many of whom are married and some of whom have children. They have the same problems and the same struggle to exist as do people twice or three times their age. Yet the Government display cynical contempt for their position, and say that we can price them into jobs. I have never heard anything so stupid as the suggestion that we can price many youngsters into jobs. No one got to grips with the problem of providing jobs for them to fill. Do those hon. Members who have spoken seriously suggest that hairdresser shops will suddenly recruit more staff? Of course not. They will simply pass out of the door those who have reached the age of 21.

I am amazed that hon. Members have not considered more carefully the problems of the restaurant trade in their areas. It is not good enough for hon. Members to comment on the problems that they have in getting people into work without seriously considering the consequences of what happens elsewhere. I hope that the alliance amendment will attract support from both sides of the House, because even some Conservative Members must realise that it is worthy of support.

There is no doubt that the Truck Acts must be considered. It would be stupid of any hon. Member to suggest that the wages councils present the best way to solve all the problems facing youngsters. That is not true, and we must investigate ways to improve the system.

This legislation will do nothing to improve the lot of young people. It will undoubtedly make it more difficult for them to survive in a job once they have it, and the cynical disregard shown by Conservative Members is a clear example of the contempt in which they hold young people. They do not give a damn about the young unemployed and by their actions they are convincing me, and I hope the young unemployed, that they have little or no regard for the people who are lucky enough to have a job. Few of those people who are now aged 18 will still be in a job when they are 21 should the Bill be passed.

When the Paymaster General sucks on his Fisherman's Friend to warm him, as he did after he finished his speech, he should consider that the heat that he gets from that will be as nothing compared with the heat of our young people when they see what this Bill will do for their prospects for the future.

9.20 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The Bill, as many Labour speakers have said, is a nasty, mean-minded measure, which will attack the living standards of some of the poorest workers. It is unacceptable to the Labour party, and it is notable that far more Members spoke from the Opposition Benches, while the Tory Whips have gone around scraping up people who have clearly come in and prepared speeches a few minutes before they delivered them.

It is not good enough for the Postmaster General—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps he is the postmaster for the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister's friend, who sits in the other place. It is not good enough for the Paymaster General simply to pretend that the Bill is tidying up some outdated legislation. It is a dishonest argument and not worthy of the serious issues that we are discussing. Equally, it is unworthy of the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) to claim to be concerned about the young unemployed. If he were, he should look at the evidence, which would make him realise that the Government's attack on the living standards of the low-paid young workers will do nothing to increase employment for young people.

Wages council workers are among the lowest paid of the low paid. We are talking about real poverty, about people who run out of money at the end of the week and who have to decide whether to buy bread or put money in the gas meter. That is not a joke, and hon. Members should not pretend that the situation can not be compared with Victorian times, when there was "real" poverty and pretend that there is not real poverty now. There is, and it is growing. In our constituencies, we meet people who suffer terrible problems, and I am shocked that Conservative Members are not sensitive to those who are suffering.

We are talking about people who are living on wages that are less than Conservative Members, and perhaps even Labour Members, would spend on one dinner. I am told that the Paymaster General is a gourmet, so he probably spends more. We are talking about cutting wages that, for adults, range from £50·25 to £76·50; and that is gross. Off that money has to be taken tax and national insurance. So people take home pay that is between £7 and £9 less than that.

Those who will be most hurt by the Bill are the young people. Some 500,000 young workers will immediately cease to have protection for their wages and see direct wage cuts. That is the Government's intention, and they want to introduce such a move. Even so, there is an attack on the wage protection for adults. The hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) kept attempting to intervene during Labour Members' speeches to suggest that there was to be no such attack, but that is not true.

One rate with no differentials for skills means that it is likely that wages will level down to that one rate. There is no special weekend working rate which means that workers, especially shop workers—the Shops Bill will come to this House shortly—will be expected to work longer hours for less pay. In retailing, this measure will lead to a loss of jobs and fewer people employed.

The meanest proposal is the lack of protection that will be given to some of the poorest workers to ensure that they have a holiday each year. We will be the only country in Europe which will cease to provide this for their workers. There will be no protection for shift workers either. The hon. Member for Banbury has tried to suggest that it is not true that there are poor people working in the wage councils sector, but I am shocked that he attempts to advance such an argument. The majority of the people who work in the wage councils sector—the lowest paid workers in Britain — are women. In one in four households the main breadwinner is a woman either because she is on her own or her partner is unemployed or low-paid. Almost half—45 per cent.—of low-paid women, working full time, are single parents or living alone.

Mr. Baldry *rose*——

Ms. Short: I shall give way when I have finished my attack on the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Banbury went on to suggest that it was somehow outrageous that in the wages councils sectors the young workers had a higher percentage of the full adult rate than they did in other sectors. He simply does not understand. A wage of £40 is the minimum on which to survive—to be able to get out, get the food, get the bus and get to work—and the minimum to make it worth working. If one is working in the low-paid sector where the adult rate is £80 or so, £40, or something approaching that, is a higher percentage of £80 than it is of the average wage across the economy — which is £168.

Mr. Baldry: I am obliged to the hon. Lady for giving way. The point I made and on which I think there is no argument, is that the main cause of poverty is not low pay but no pay. I was not seeking to suggest that there were not people working in the wages councils sector who were in poverty. But, overall, poverty is due to no pay rather than low pay.

Ms. Short: We agree that unemployment is far too high and causes poverty. We know that under this Government unemployment has soared and that the incidence of low pay has increased. The number of people earning poverty pay has increased massively under this Government. The two have gone together—an increase in poverty because of unemployment and an increase in poverty because of low pay. It is not one or the other.

The Government's proposals are based on pure dogma and blind prejudice, and the Paymaster General knows that. There may be some Tory Back Benchers who believe in Tory dogma and propaganda and have not examined the evidence, but I do not believe that the Ministers at the Department of Employment are not aware that their case is unproven. The Government have scratched around and commissioned research project after research project to try to prove that their dogmatic views are true. They have failed. There is no respectable academic evidence to support their views. The Government are aware of that and should be ashamed of trying to suggest otherwise.

Britain has a low wage economy. The hourly wage level in Britain is below that of every other European country. Unit labour costs in real terms, measured in a common currency, fell by 10 per cent. between 1979 and 1984. If we compare Britain with the United States—which we understand is the great model which we should emulate and to which we should sell half our industries —unit labour costs rose by 24 per cent. in the same period.

Let us take the example of Japan — Conservative Members should try to understand the lesson that is available from Japan. Between 1967 and 1977, United Kingdom hourly earnings rose by 13·5 per cent. while those in Japan rose by 15·9 per cent. The hourly rates in Japan rose to a greater extent. However, unit labour costs in Japan rose by only 8·1 per cent. as compared with 11·5 per cent. in the United Kingdom. It is significant that, during the period 1974-1977, Japan's gross capital investment per head of population was more than twice that of the United Kingdom. That is the remedy.

What is wrong with the British economy is our low investment over a long time. The answer does not lie with low wages and sweat shops, which create such unstable conditions that employers cannot invest because they are under-bidding each other for cheap labour. The result of that is Britain competing with the poorest countries in the world, and never getting out of our difficulties.

We are told that wages are too high in the wages councils sector and that, if they would only drop, there would be more jobs. From 1974 to 1984, pay has fallen steadily as a percentage of national earnings in that sector — from 73 per cent. to 65 per cent. It has been suggested that pay in the wages councils sector has increased. That is quite wrong. What is more, there has been no increase in the number of jobs. What the Government are telling us has been tested, and it does not work.

The Government claim that it is necessary to create jobs for young workers and therefore to cut their wages. We were told in the disgraceful press release put out by the Department of Employment, which was not sent to us, and which the Paymaster General read today:

"The central purpose of the Bill is to create new job opportunities, particularly for young people."

Since 1979, payment to young workers has fallen relative to adult workers. Young males are now paid 30 per cent. less in comparison with average earnings and women are paid 24 per cent. less than the average, yet unemployment has doubled.

The Government's thesis has been tested. Young people's wages have fallen dramatically, but unemployment has continued to increase dramatically. What are these massive wages of young workers that must be cut? Men under 18 get 34·9 per cent. of the adult rate of pay. How can anybody suggest that that is not significantly cheaper than an adult? Men aged 18 to 20 get 55·7 per cent. of the adult rate. In terms of money, first year apprentices in hairdressing get £31·75 gross. They have to pay tax and national insurance out of that. Other young hairdressers receive £37·70. These are the earnings which Conservative Members want to cut. In retailing, the rate for 16-year-olds is about £47. The Paymaster General told us that he wanted such a level of pay reduced. He should

[Ms. Short]

be ashamed of himself. I am sure that he spends more on one dinner. In retailing, 17-year-olds get between £52 and £55—as much as £20 less than an adult doing the same job.

We have more evidence from a Government experiment — the young workers' scheme. The Government have already tested the thesis. They subsidised young people's wages, and at enormous expense. They paid £15 a week to an employer who would pay £45 or less a week to a young worker, and £7·50 if he paid £50 or less. What did they find? The Institute for Manpower Studies in Sussex found that 94 per cent. of the subsidised jobs would have existed anyway. That was a massive subsidy to cut youth wages to generate all of the jobs that we were told would cry out to be filled if only wages were lower, but they did not materialise. Employers grabbed the subsidy for jobs that would have existed anyway. The Government's own figure is 77 per cent.

And what of the 10 per cent. of new jobs that were created? No less than 40 per cent. were adult jobs. Young people replaced adults. What the Government are doing in the Bill was tested in that scheme, and it failed. That is why the Government have got rid of the scheme. In so far as the Bill will succeed, it will enable young people to be employed at the expense of adults. Those adults will be mostly women, probably the young people's mothers. When they are 21, the young people will be chucked out of work so that their younger brothers, sisters and cousins can be taken into low-paid work.

The Government pretend that some of this simplification—and I think that we would agree on a need for a review of the wages council orders but not an undermining of protection for the low paid—is necessary because so many of the firms in this sector are small. That simply is not true. It is worrying for us to face a Government who keep pouring out claims for their legislation but when we examine the evidence, we find repeatedly that the claims are false. It is not a matter of interpretation; they are falsified.

For example, as I said to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) in an intervention, Income Data Services did a survey of wage council workers in retailing, hotels and the licensed trade—that is, 2 million workers out of 2·75 million workers. In its words and not mine, these sectors are dominated by large, if not giant, firms. It cannot be argued that such massive employers do not understand wages council orders and are incapable of applying them. The Department of Employment's own surveys of employers and small businesses found no expression of concern in any quantity about the problems of employment legislation in respect to wage councils.

The ILO convention has been mentioned by a number of my hon. Friends, and 94 countries have signed it. It is the most popular convention. Many Third world countries have signed it and have agreed to give some minimum protection to workers and young workers. One country finds it necessary to get out of that convention, and that is Britain. Britain cannot afford to protect its young in the way that Third world countries can. We should be deeply ashamed. We hear Conservatives talk about the need to cut wages and to create jobs. How is it that all these other countries can manage to comply with that convention but we cannot?

What else do we know? We know what the Government have done since they came to power. They have weakened the existing protection given by the wages councils. The number of inspectors has been cut by one third. The number of employers who have been breaking the law has grown. Those figures have been quoted in a number of speeches. What do we expect? The law has been weakened and now they will enforce it even less and it will be broken even more. Even those weedy conditions which are included in the Bill will not apply to all workers, and the kind of protection which they are entitled to expect in Britain in 1986 will not be forthcoming.

The Truck Acts have been mentioned by a number of my hon. Friends. The Government say that they want to encourage cashless pay. We are not against cashless pay, but we think, as do the banks, that it should not be forced upon people. In our view, employees are entitled to negotiate. For some workers, there are difficulties: if one earns a small amount of money it may not be worth having a bank account, and some other arrangements will have to be made. For example, if one lives in a rural area and cannot easily get to a bank, that will need to be accommodated. It should be a matter of free choice and negotiation. It is not necessary to take away from workers the right to object. Employers should be required to negotiate with workers if they want to move to cashless pay. As I said earlier, the banks did not even ask for this. There is a long-term trend away from cash pay and towards people having bank accounts. We would expect that trend to continue, but let people do it freely as they wish and not have it forced upon them by a Government who take away the protections they previously enjoyed.

The Government make a false claim when they state that in future all workers will be better protected because deductions of more than 10 per cent. cannot be made. The only remedy that workers have is to go to a tribunal. The only penalty for employers is that they will be forced to pay back 10 per cent. All employers will surely say: if in doubt, deduct. Employers will be deducting 10 per cent. in retailing, in garages and so on in the absence of a penalty. In addition, there has been no increase in the penalty for employers who break wages council orders, yet as new criminal justice legislation is enacted, fines are being increased. The Government do not mean to enforce the legislation or to punish employers who are breaking the law.

What does it all amount to? As I said at the beginning, it is a mean-minded measure based on dogma, not evidence. It is an attempt to cut the wages of the poorest workers in Britain. It will not create jobs; it will simply create more poverty. It is wrong on the basis of justice for working people; it is also wrong on the basis of economic efficiency. It is nonsense if Britain goes down the road of seeking to compete with the poorest countries.

The good employer who wants to train his work force and who wants to invest will be undercut by the bad. That is what Winston Churchill said in 1909 and what the CBI said in part of its evidence in the Government's consultation. There is a real danger that the bad employer will undercut the good. That is the road that we are going down.

We will have sweatshop conditions. In my region of the west midlands we used to have full employment and decent wage levels. We now have some of the lowest wage levels in the country. In my constituency we have Victorian textile sweatshops employing people at illegal

rates of pay in dangerous conditions. In other parts of the country where the clothing industry has more capital investment, more training and more sophistication, it is being undercut and is being forced to close down. That is bad for employees in Birmingham and the west midlands, and it is a bad road for the Government to go down.

Let us hear nothing more from the Prime Minister in interviews with the CBI magazine about her great concern for the low-paid and her anxiety to ensure that they should have tax cuts. We know that the Government have no concern for the low-paid; otherwise they would withdraw the Bill. We shall fight it thoroughly in Committee.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): We have had an interesting and useful debate. Much has been said with a strength of feeling that I recognise. We are being pulled in opposite directions by two different tides. Some hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), suggest that we should keep wages councils in exactly their present form, while others, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) suggest that we have not gone far enough. Between those positions, we are proposing a sensible and moderate reform.

Having listened carefully to the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), I believe that they brought the wrong speeches to the debate. They talked continually as if we intended to scrap the wages councils system. That is not the case. Certainly we intend to reduce rigidities and red tape in the labour market to promote jobs. Certainly we intend to bring the law on the payment of wages into the 20th century. Certainly we intend to help young people to take that vital first step on the employment ladder against competition from older and more experienced workers.

At the same time, we want to maintain a basic level of protection for workers in wages council industries where the work of the councils has become an accepted part of the fabric of the industry. We also want to provide new protection against deductions from pay where there is known abuse to ensure that workers are paid what is rightly due to them and that a large proportion of their pay packets does not disappear in deductions. I repeat that we are retaining wages councils.

Useful points have been made in the debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General and I will consider them seriously. That is a genuine commitment. It is expected that Governments of all political persuasions do not listen to the appeals made to them when they put forward Green Papers or consultative documents. In this case we issued consultative documents on parts I and II of the Bill. We have settled on proposals that won majority support in the consultation exercise. So the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) is wrong. We could have gone down the route of scrapping wages councils but we decided not to do that because we thought that we should opt for the moderate way. We recognise that many employers were making representations to us at that time saying that they thought they were useful in the particular fabric of that industry.

Mr. Eastham: The Minister has said to the House that the Government intend to retain the wages councils. That is meaningless, because Member after Member has said that thousands of firms are breaking the law. Is the Minister saying that the Government propose to ensure that those companies will abide by the orders of the wages councils? They are obviously not doing so at present.

Mr. Trippier: We are actually talking about people who are breaking the law—only 8 per cent. of those who were visited. We are concentrating on the worst offenders. I think that the hon. Gentleman will have to accept that we intend to keep up the pressure on that. The point that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues must accept is that we are determined to keep the wages councils in their present form but without the control across a wide front for those aged under 21.

We have listened to those who have made representations to us in the consultation procedure. One would have thought that that would receive some welcome from the Opposition, but it did not. The views of some hon. Members, as expressed today, seem to be as rigidly set in the old mould as some of the ancient and anomalous legislation that the Bill seeks to repeal. It is vital to see the Bill in the context of the Government's wider policy of deregulation and simplification. We are intent on removing burdens and red tape from employers. We want to let the ordinary business man, principally the small business man, get on with the job that he is good at—creating wealth and work. The one thing which has been missing from the debate is any recognition by the Opposition of the people who set up those businesses and create the jobs.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: It is as if the jobs were conjured out of thin air. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. One at a time.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: If the hon. Member will take his seat, he will enjoy this. I am going to attack the alliance.

The alliance amendment is absolutely fascinating. It seems that the alliance parties have completely abandoned the small business man's lobby. They do not seem to recognise that they are the people who create the jobs. Yet, in the past, the alliance has been quick enough to fly on our coat tails when we have been pursuing the policy of deregulation and simplification. I have had question after question on that matter in the past. Can this be a U-turn by the alliance? Is it going to abandon the small business man altogether?

Mr. Wainwright: Did the Minister not hear me say that the CBI, through its small firms division and then its council, has shown no enthusiasm for the major parts of the Bill, for the good reason that no self-respecting new or small business man wants to be labelled a third-rate employer?

Mr. Trippier: I have a great deal of regard for the CBI's small firms council but representations by the CBI generally, I should think, would not represent the small firms lobby in general. I was fascinated when, far from suggesting that we should deregulate, the hon. Gentleman suggested that we should have different rates of pay in all travel-to-work areas. By my estimation that makes 334——

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber for the majority of the debate.

Mr. Robert C. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: That would make 334 different rates of pay. If the Bill gives the average small employer in a wages council industry a little more time to spend on running his business, developing it and strengthening it, rather than having to grapple with the complexity of wages council orders, it will be a worthwhile measure on that score alone. In the wider context, the Bill has a significant contribution to make to changes in the way that we regard methods of creating wealth and jobs, developing——

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask you to help my right hon. and hon. Friends, Mr. Speaker. We had great difficulty earlier on. Is it the case that the Minister said that only 8 per cent. of employers break the law——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman heard that perfectly well.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman should not have risen in his place. I am trying desperately to answer some of the questions that have been asked by his hon. Friends during the debate. He is wasting the time of the whole House. If my responsibilities——

Mr. Cabom *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be fair. He has had a fair crack of the whip. He had the opportunity to make his speech and he intervened in the speeches of others. He did not allow others to intervene while he was speaking. I have allowed many interventions in my reply. I think that the hon. Gentleman had better resume his seat.

Given my responsibilities within the Department I have considered the Bill in the light of the question, what will it do for the small employer and his work force? The short answer is that it will do a great deal. Part I makes it possible to sort out a system of wage payments that suits everyone. The employer will not find that he can offer a far better package of terms of employment to non-manual workers, perhaps including fringe benefits such as a car, than he can offer to manual workers, for fear that manual workers will complain about a breach of the Truck Acts. That is something on which no one seems to have touched during the debate. The employer will be able to sort out a set of controls on deductions from pay that is agreed between him and his employees and which ensures that everyone knows where he stands, with a quick and simple system of appeal to an industrial tribunal.

Part II will make wages council orders much simpler to understand. It will limit them to the basic elements in pay and will ensure that wages councils consider the employment implications of the decisions that they take, which is only common sense.

Part II will open up the possibility for employers to take on extra young people at a rate of pay that properly reflects the value that they can add to the business. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) was making—I think that he was doing so effectively—and that is what will concern the potential employer. He will address himself to the value that a young person will be able to add to the business.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: If the young person will be unable to cover his own wage, the employer will not accept him or her. We must recognise that young and inexperienced workers will not be able to add the same value to the business as older workers. That is the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) rightly advanced. Faced with that choice, the employer will not normally take on young workers if more experienced workers are on offer.

If we have an order of priorities, we must concentrate on young workers, and the Bill will assist in that process. There may be some substitution, but we believe that there will be a net increase in employment as a result of our proposals.

Part III introduces a sensible reform in that it frees public spending on job creation instead of subsidising redundancy. The position of small employers is safeguarded and——

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister give way on part II?

Mr. Trippier: No.

However, the position of the small employer is safeguarded. Much has been said, particularly by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) about young workers. The Bill will give youngsters a chance. Furthermore, relatively few young workers have the same family responsibilities as adults, and for those who do there is financial support in the family income supplement.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has made his speech. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Trippier: The philosophy of the legislation is to return such questions as holiday entitlement, which is a contractual matter, to agreement between employer and employee. And so they should be.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: All the existing contractual rights of workers will continue. I say again that we are not scrapping the wages councils.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Trippier: Much has been made in the debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take the point of order.

Mr. Nellist: You have had occasion, Mr. Speaker—perhaps more than once during the two and a half years that I have been a Member of Parliament—to remind me of the traditions and customs of this House. The Minister referred specifically to me. Is it not, in your opinion, the custom for him to give way when I ask him to do so?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the Minister is referring to speeches that have been made during the debate. He is necessarily referring to hon. Members who have spoken in the debate.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman has a nerve, Mr. Speaker. I cut my wind-up speech from half an hour to 20

minutes to allow hon. Members such as him to get in, because every time the hon. Gentleman opens his mouth he helps our side.

Much has been made in the debate of the different conclusions that have been drawn relating to the impact —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are getting towards the end of the debate. Let us keep it in order.

Mr. Trippier: As I have already said, much has been made of the different conclusions that have been drawn relating to the impact upon wages council rates. The studies reach different conclusions. That has been referred to by both sides of the House.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: Different conclusions are also drawn about the scale of the effects. However, in one respect they point in the same direction. In general, the different studies provide evidence that regulating wages and pushing them up can harm job prospects, especially for the young. A common-sense conclusion seems to be drawn and it is generally understood to be the basic law of economics: to raise the price means to cut the demand. When the abolition of the wages councils was being debated, the studies produced a wide variety of estimates.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Trippier: All showed some gain in the number of jobs. Even the study "From the Dole Queue to the Sweatshop", published by the Low Pay Unit—this was referred to by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn)—and written by Henry Neuberger who styles himself the economic researcher to the Leader of the Opposition, estimated that 8,000 jobs would be created. Earlier today the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) pressed my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General for a figure. We have now given that figure. *[Interruption.]* It is given in this study and it shows a net increase. We are happy that there is general acceptance of the fact that there is a net increase in the number of jobs.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Trippier: No.

The most amazing hypocrisy that we have heard from Opposition Members would lead one to believe that the Opposition, when in government, had never scrappd a wages council, yet during the last two periods when the Opposition were in office they presided over the scrapping——

Mr. Prescott: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Trippier: No, not on this point.

More than 500,000 people came out of the wages council system. That was referred to by the hon. Friends of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, not by him.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, it was.

Mr. Trippier: The same sympathy should have been expressed for those who came out of the wages council system then as have come out of it subsequently, and who may have come out of it very recently.

Small firms have had a poor deal out of the redundancy rebate scheme. They have been paying in contributions for the past 20 years but have been getting little back. There have been massive redundancies in the nationalised industries, including steel, gas and rail, and in large organisations, such as GEC and ICI. This is good legislation for jobs, especially for young people seeking work. It is good for business men, especially small business men. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 25, Noes 265.

Division No. 67] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Freud, Clement
Hancock, Michael
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Meadowcroft, Michael
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Penhaligon, David
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Wainwright, R.
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Gordon
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Alton and
Mr. James Wallace.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond

Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harvey, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irving, Charles
Key, Robert
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archie Hamilton and
Mr. Francis Maude.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 206.

Division No. 68] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Fry, Peter
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harvey, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irving, Charles
Key, Robert
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*

Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Francis Maude.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*

Rowlands, Ted	Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Ryman, John	Tinn, James
Sedgemore, Brian	Torney, Tom
Sheerman, Barry	Wainwright, R.
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.	Wallace, James
Shore, Rt Hon Peter	Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*	Wareing, Robert
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*	Weetch, Ken
Skinner, Dennis	Welsh, Michael
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*	White, James
Snape, Peter	Wigley, Dafydd
Soley, Clive	Williams, Rt Hon A.
Spearing, Nigel	Wilson, Gordon
Steel, Rt Hon David	Winnick, David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*	Woodall, Alec
Stott, Roger	Wrigglesworth, Ian
Strang, Gavin	Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Straw, Jack	
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*	Tellers for the Noes:
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*	Mr. Ron Davies and
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*	Mr. Ray Powell.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Atomic Energy Authority Bill [*Lords*] may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour. —[*Mr. Archie Hamilton.*]

WAGES BILL [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Wages Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of the following, namely—

(a) any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of provisions of that Act relating to wages councils;

(b) any expenses incurred by such councils in accordance with the terms of any authorisation given by the Secretary of State with the consent of the Treasury;

(c) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.

—[*Mr. Archie Hamilton.*]

Atomic Energy Authority Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 6

SUPERVISORY POWERS OF SECRETARY OF STATE

10.27 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I beg to move amedment No. 1, in page 5, line 13, at end insert

'which will ensure funding for safety'.

I shall not go into the detail of the arguments raised in Committee, but the Minister is aware that I undertook to consider closely what he had to say when we discussed the safety aspect, which was one of the most important debates in Committee. We simply sought to write into the Bill statutory provision for safety in the nuclear power industry. I have closely considered the Minister's response. I cannot say that he did not reply in detail, because he listed a long catalogue of what the industry was doing in this respect. However, I believe that his reply was defective on the obvious count that, if all that was done, we would have had a different Bill. It cannot be denied that the decision to re-organise the Atomic Energy Authority on a trading fund basis changes the position. If it did not, why should we have the Bill?

I mention the role of the Central Electricity Generating Board, because my sources inform me that the organisation is refusing to pay its levy on the work carried out. If that is so, the main thrust and import of the Bill is defective, because we are discussing the finances of the new authority. As to the external financing limit of the new authority, if it required, for example, £15 million and was granted only £9 million, that would affect its work. May I ask the Minister whether such an application has been made and whether the approved funding differs from the application?

At column 31 of the report of the Committee's second sitting on 30 January, the Minister said that my attempt to amend the Bill to provide mandatory provision or requirement was difficult to interpret, because one could not exactly interpret what constitutes an adequate programme. My amendment, which will ensure funding for safety, has removed the word "adequate". The Minister now has the opportunity to write into the Bill such statutory provision. While such a debate is raging about safety in the industry, it would be unwise to leave safety permissive. Indeed, it would be unsafe to do so.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): In Committee, the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) raised a crucial issue for debate on safety, to which he has returned today, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss at some length what the authority is doing in this area and how the work would be funded once the authority is operating on a trading fund basis.

In Committee, the hon. Gentleman quoted figures from the 1984-85 annual report and accounts. The figure of £20 million which I gave on Second Reading related to planned expenditure for 1986-87 under programme letters in thermal reactor and general safety research. The two are not strictly comparable. The content of the programmes in all these areas will have moved on somewhat in the intervening time, and the priorities within the programmes

will inevitably change as results come forward. Furthermore, as I said in February of last year when announcing the Government's decisions on the review, the Government were determined that the vote funding of the authority should be sufficient to safeguard an independent programme of research into nuclear safety, but that this did not preclude an increase in funding by the generating boards in specific areas.

In recent years, the CEGB has increased its funding of thermal reactor work—for example, in PWRs—by the authority. As a result of discussions following the review, the generating boards agreed additional contributions to thermal reactor and general safety-related research and development by the authority, to replace some Government funding. As I said, we consider that these shifts in funding are sound, and overall our judgment is that they will have no impact on the authority's independence in nuclear safety research.

The latest estimates of programme letter expenditure envisage the following approximate breakdown in the authority's charges to the Department for 1986-87: for PWR safety, more than £6 million; for the AGR, more than £11 million; and for general nuclear safety research, about £4 million. That gives a total of about £22 million. In addition, the element of the fast reactor programme explicitly concerned with safety is expected to have departmental funding of more than £6 million. Of course, safety-related matters are an important feature of many other parts of the fast reactor programme funded by the Department.

Other work, which was covered by the authority in the "general safety" heading of the annual report, included radiological protection research, nuclear instrumentation work, safeguards work, and the cost of the authority's reactor and plant safety services, or ARPS. All that work will continue. Nuclear instrumentation and ARPS will be charged to overheads, which means that the Department will contribute about £1 million to those. The safeguards programme will continue at a cost of nearly £1 million. Radiological protection work will continue to be Government funded to a significant extent, although only a relatively small proportion will come from the Department of Energy. Substantial funding, totalling almost £2 million in 1986-87 will come from other Government Departments who are particularly interested in the content and results of work in this area, namely the Departments of Environment, and Health and Social Security and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

As I said in Committee, the direct funding of research does not cover the full extent of the Authority's expenditure on safety. I do not propose, as I know that the hon. Member for Midlothian does not want me to, to repeat the very full description I gave to members of the Committee about the many facets of the authority's work, which have a bearing on nuclear safety. I can assure the House that the Government attach the highest priority to nuclear safety, and recognise the importance of high quality research in this. The move to the trading fund does not change this view, or its effects and substantial funding of safety related work by my Department will continue.

In the light of these assurances and the explanations that I have given, I hope that the hon. Member for Midlothian will now seek to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Eadie: I can hardly say that I am satisfied with the Minister's explanation, but I am content in that I have placed on the record what I regard as an important aspect of the Bill. No doubt the staff in particular will read what the Minister said with interest, and time will test it. However, I hope that at no stage will we decide that there has been inadequate funding of research. The Government and the Minister will have it on their heads if that happens.

On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

10.37 pm

Mr. Goodlad: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We have had a number of useful discussions during the debates on the Bill. I pay tribute to the constructive approach taken by Labour Members. They have probed a number of detailed points relating to the financial framework and future of the Atomic Energy Authority, and I have given a number of assurances.

The main purpose of the Bill is to place the Authority on a trading fund basis, with borrowing powers and a revised capital structure. This is a small but important Bill.

I remind hon. Members of the changes that we propose to the financial framework for the authority. First, the authority will have a revised capital structure, including commencing capital debt, reserves and provisions. We have had a debate on alternatives, but I have emphasised that we regard a commencing capital debt as a sound feature of this revised capital structure and see no need for equity. It is expected after consultations with the authority and the Treasury that the debt will be set at about £80 million. Uncertainties inevitably exist when looking to the future, but assuming a broad continuation of the authority's existing business prospects, forward projections suggest that the authority should be left with a modest profit after payment of interest on its debt. A clear financial target has been agreed with the authority. Over the next three years they will aim to run the business to achieve an annual average return of 5 per cent. on current cost capital employed. Reporting profits, before interest, at this level, while still remaining competitive, will be a challenge for the authority in the early years of the fund but not, we believe, an unrealistic one.

Continued reliance by the authority on grant-aid is not a realistic option for the late 1980s and 1990s. We believe that a trading fund basis for its future operations is a sound one, and will give it the scope to develop its business while ensuring that it responds effectively to customer needs. The authority will in future have the ability to carry surpluses or deficits forward from one year to the next. This will give increased flexibility. It will have greater discretion over the use of internally generated funds, and in future profits from repayment work and royalties resulting from the fund's new intellectual property will contribute to internal funds. In the case of royalties deriving from programme letter work, the proceeds will be shared.

Finally, new capital investment can be financed by borrowing—if internal resources are insufficient—rather than being constrained by the annual grant-in-aid. These freedoms will, we consider, lead to a real change in the way in which the authority is able to conduct its business even though it will not be freed of all controls. This would be quite wrong. It remains within the public sector and will

[Mr. Goodlad]

be in receipt of considerable sums of public money either through programme letters or loans from the National Loans Fund. The controls we are proposing therefore are those necessary to ensure the proper control of public expenditure and the authority's continued accountability to Parliament.

I move on to the detailed provisions of the Bill. Clause 1 provides for the assumption by the authority of a commencing capital debt in the form of a notional loan from the National Loans Fund, deemed to be made on 1 April 1986, and repayable with interest out of the authority's trading profits. I have already described how it will fit into the authority's overall capital structure and financial framework. Clause 2 allows for borrowing from the National Loans Fund in sterling, and for borrowing from elsewhere in any currency if the Secretary of State, with Treasury approval, consents. The amount that the authority can borrow will be subject to the overall limits set in clause 3 and to an annual external financing limit.

Clause 4 empowers the Secretary of State to lend to the authority and sets out the procedures governing such loans. Clause 5 permits the Treasury to guarantee borrowing by the authority from non-Government sources, and sets out the arrangements to be followed if any such guarantee is called. Clause 6 provides that the authority carry out capital investment and other developments only within plans approved by the Secretary of State. Clause 7 provides that compensation may be paid by members of the authority for loss of office, for which there is no provision in the 1954 Act, and repeals section 1(8) of the 1954 Act. Clause 8 clarifies the authority's powers to exploit its intellectual property.

The Bill's enactment will change the direction of the authority in the coming years. Moving to a trading fund will, I believe, lead to increased efficiency, greater scope for development of the authority's business and increased responsiveness to the needs of its customers. I have assured the House that, with these changes, there will be no loss of accountability to the House. The authority expects to continue a vigorous and independent underlying research programme and there will be no effect on nuclear safety.

Hon. Members have probed at considerable length and often whether this Bill is a prelude to privatisation. I have given them a clear assurance, and I will repeat it again. The Government have no plans to privatise the authority. Anxiety has been expressed about undue influence by the Central Electricity Generating Board. I have explained that, even after the shifts in funding that I announced last year, its contribution to the Authority, in terms of turnover, will be less than 15 per cent.

I expect the authority, with its excellent scientific and technical track record, to keep its existing wide range of customers in the United Kingdom and abroad, and to add to it as it pursues a more commercial approach. This, and the maintenance of significant Government funding with the authority's reputation for the integrity and quality of its work, will be a significant safeguard against undue influence from any quarter.

Hon. Members have emphasised the impact of the Bill and the revised financial framework on the employees of the authority. As I said on Second Reading, the dedication and skills of the authority's workforce are its most important assets. Their attitude and morale are crucial to the success of the trading fund. I hope and believe that they will respond to the challenge it sets. I have given an assurance that we do not intend to set cash limits for the authority's salaries and wages bill. Terms and conditions of service for the Authority's non-industrial employees are currently linked to those of the Civil Service. As I have said, it would not be for the Government to suggest any change in those arrangements. That would be a matter for the Authority and the staff trade unions concerned, within the machinery established under the 1954 Act.

I would like to say something about consultation with employees. There are, of course, two joint bodies involved in consultation in the authority — the National Joint Industrial Council, including representatives of industrial employees, and the authority Whitley Council, including representatives of the non-industrial unions. The employees' representatives of both of those bodies were invited formally, by letter on 20 December, to consider proposals for joint consultation under the trading fund, with particular reference to consultation on corporate planning.

In the case of the staff trade union side, that had been proceded by some informal discussions about the consultation procedures to be applied. They were the discussions to which the Lord Gray of Contin was referring when, on 19 December, he said:

"The trade unions are involved in discussions at the present time".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 December 1985; Vol. 469, c. 904.]

The record does not, however, draw a clear distinction between those discussions and consultations with the industrial trade unions. I would therefore like to clarify this matter. At that date, the industrial trade unions had not been involved in specific discussions about the consultation procedures to be followed under the trading fund. There had been only a brief discussion at the National Joint Industrial Council meeting on 5 December about the trading fund and its implication for the authority's industrial employees.

The formal approach to industrial and non-industrial employees' representatives was made the following day. No formal response has yet been received. I understand from the authority that it would be the normal practice for the bodies involved to consult their constituent unions before responding.

As I emphasised in Committee, I recognise the importance that authority employees attach to being involved in a meaningful way in discussions with the management about the future of the business, and I strongly support them in that.

I believe that putting the authority's operations on a trading fund basis, within the financial framework that I have outlined, provides a sound basis for the future. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.44 pm

Mr. Eadie: I have already expressed disappointment at the fact that the Government have not seen fit to amend the Bill in any way. Even the Minister confirmed that our approach to the Bill was constructive and not in any way destructive. After all, the House must remember that we are seeking to change the structure of the authority after 30 years at the behest of the Government. We have read and heard with keen interest what has been stated in relation to privatisation—that it is not the Government's intention to privatise the authority in this or any other

Parliament. That was read with great interest by the staff of the AEA. We as an Opposition invited the Minister to state the Government's position. We regret that the Government did not take the opportunity to deal with the non-nuclear activities of the authority. If our suggestion had been accepted, it would have underlined the role which the authority plays in this sphere and it would have enhanced the status of the AEA rather than diminish it. That was the last opportunity before the new life of the AEA as constituted in the Bill.

Although the Minister in his speech demonstrated that there had been some second thoughts, I think that the Government put up a very weak defence for not writing into the Bill a requirement of consultation with the recognised trade unions. As a Government, they have not begun to realise that such a statutory right would have been a breath of fresh air in industrial relations. What a source of strength this would have been in an industry which has experienced difficulty in achieving public acceptability. The Government have missed a great opportunity in failing to make this a statutory provision in the Bill.

With regard to membership of the new board and its independence free from commercial interests, the Government promised that this would be allowed. They will be watched and tested by their actions. The Government have a scandalous record in appointments of all descriptions, and have probably done great damage in this respect. Most appointments have the tarnish of being sympathetic to government. For some, this is a monstrous libel on their professional qualifications and integrity.

We still do not know who is to be the new chairman of the authority. We should know this before the Bill completes its passage through the House. I have already had wind of a name, and understand that it is to be the chancellor of one of our universities. If that is so, we are at least saved from the embarrassment and burden of another banker of city accountant-cum-financier. The Government have a bad record in such information having to be prized from them.

Before the debate ends, the Opposition want to know the name and the qualifications of the person who will become chairman of the new Atomic Energy Authority. Parliament has a right to know when it is asked to pass the Bill. I hope that the Minister will respond to that question. On Second Reading and in Committee we raised the issue repeatedly and we were told that the appointment would be announced.

10.50 pm

Mr. Goodlad: With the leave of the House. The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) has rehearsed again some very important points that we have covered during the proceedings on the Bill. He raised the question of the chairmanship of the authority. As I said in Committee, the Secretary of State shares with him an appreciation of the urgency of the matter. I hope that an announcement will be made before too long. The hon. Gentleman will understand, as will the House, that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any individual who has been or is being considered.

No doubt the hon. Gentleman would wish, as would all hon. Members, to join me in paying tribute to the very distinguished tenure of office of Mr. Arnold Allen, the chairman who has led the authority in the last two years. I also pay tribute to the employees of the authority for having established it as a pre-eminent body in its sphere in the world.

The enactment of the Bill will mark the end of one era for the authority, but it will open up a new one and will provide new disciplines, challenges and opportunities.

The authority's key role as adviser to the Government will remain. Funding will move closer to a customer-contractor relationship, and the nuclear industry will take on a greater share of funding. But substantial Government funding of safety research will continue, as I have said. The authority's capability for underlying research will be maintained by contributions from all customers. Accountability to Parliament will be preserved.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Police, Fire and Civil Defence

10.52 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Giles Shaw): I beg to move,

That the draft Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

The draft order, which I shall be inviting the House to approve, comes at the end of a long process of consultation between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the police joint authorities and fire and civil defence joint authorities established by the Local Government Act 1985. It may help hon. Members to understand the very careful consideration which has been given to the question of the resources which the joint authorities will need if I set out the steps under the Rates Act 1984 which have been followed.

My right hon. Friend notified the joint authorities as soon as they were set up last September of the expenditure level that he had determined for them for 1986-87. At the same time, it was explained to the authorities how they could apply to the Home Secretary to increase the level. All six of the police joint authorities and all seven of the fire and civil defence joint authorities applied for a higher expenditure level. Having closely examined the applications, my right hon. Friend concluded that a higher level was necessary for all the authorities, although he did not feel in most cases that the full increase applied for was justified. In the case of the seven fire and civil defence authorities, he invited them to consider the scope for further economies by imposing a 1·5 per cent. efficiency saving on what would otherwise have been their redetermined expenditure levels.

On the basis of the new expenditure levels, and in the light of the rate support grant settlement for 1986-87, my right hon. Friend notified each authority just before Christmas of the maximum precept that he intended to set. Once again, the joint authorities were invited to make representations if they considered a higher maximum necessary. Three of the police joint authorities, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Yorkshire, asked for small increases in the maximum precept. We considered their arguments carefully but concluded that increases were not necessary. Since those three authorities were not able to accept the maximum precept which my right hon. Friend proposed or agree another maximum with him, he must set their maximum by this order. That is why their names are accordingly in the schedule on the reverse of the order before the House. For the three police joint authorities which have agreed a maximum precept, my right hon. Friend has set the precept under the Rates Act 1984 by a notice in writing, as he is required to do.

Five of the fire and civil defence authorities, those for London, the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Yorkshire, requested additional money; the three latter authorities asked again for the sums specified in their original applications. All except West Yorkshire submitted a further statement in support of these applications and the reasons why a further increase was thought to be necessary. These were discussed at a series of meetings with representatives from each of the authorities. The arguments were carefully examined and my right hon. Friend decided to increase the maximum precept in each case except for West Yorkshire. It should be noted that part of these increases reflected his acceptance that these four authorities could not achieve 1·5 per cent. efficiency savings in 1986-87. The revised amounts proposed were accepted by the London and West Midlands authorities, but not by the other three. Consequently these — Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Yorkshire—are listed in the schedule on the reverse of the order.

May I remind the House why we decided to provide in the Local Government Act 1985 for these joint authorities to be subject to controls on their precepts. It was not because we thought that there had been serious overspending in the services. It was, as colleagues who were in Committee on the Local Government Bill will well remember, to prevent future overspending by the establishment of extravagant and expensive bureaucracies. Certainly, in recent times, it was also to ensure that proper levels of support would be forthcoming for expenditure for the police. It follows that, while we have not ignored the possibility of efficiency savings, particularly in the fire service, we have not sought to reduce the levels of service currently provided in each area. On the contrary, during the passage of the 1985 Act I and other Ministers gave firm and explicit assurances on the future level of both the police and fire services in the metropolitan areas.

We made it quite clear that, in exercising our controls over the police joint authorities, our aim would be broadly to maintain the current level of service in these metropolitan areas. We promised that there would be no arbitrary cuts in police expenditure. We stressed that we were not assuming that there would be any more savings from the police service as a result of abolition. We have fulfilled all these undertakings. I am happy to say that the police joint authorities have taken a responsible and constructive attitude to the exercise and that there are no substantial differences between us. As I said, we have not been able to agree a maximum precept with the three authorities covered by the draft order, but the particular points of disagreement are different in each case and involve relatively small sums. In Greater Manchester it is some £800,000 out of a total budget of some £84·5 million, in Merseyside £825,000 out of £60·4 million, and in West Yorkshire £425,000 out of just under £64 million.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Minister will remember, as he said, that we had exchanges in Committee on the Local Government Bill. He gave certain undertakings about service, but the other undertakings that he gave were about cost. If we take the figures for Merseyside which the Minister is asking the House to agree, the total of the precept level on the ratepayers of Merseyside of the fire, police and civil defence precept, and of that in the subsequent order—the figure suggested for the passenger transport authority —will, if I have calculated correctly, be 77·69p. That is clearly higher than this year's cost as levied through the county authority. Will the Minister therefore accept that he has to come before the House admitting that the cost to the ratepayer of abolition and change of structure will be higher, as the Opposition parties suggested it would be, and not at the level predicted by himself and his colleagues when we debated it a year ago?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman is seeking to find an example to support his argument, and he has found that of

the passenger transport authority. He will be aware that that is the subject of the debate that is to follow this one and that it does not relate to the precept in this order. He will be aware also that the overall savings to be attributed to the Local Government Act amount to £100 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made it clear that no breakdown was submitted to the Committee which considered that measure to enable the judgment to be made by which the hon. Gentleman would seek to trap me.

I shall proceed. We have fulfilled all the undertakings that I gave and I am happy to say that the police joint authorities have taken a constructive and responsible attitude to the changes. The differences between us and those who have expressed disagreement are small. I can assure the House that the sums involved will allow all the police joint authorities fully to discharge their statutory duty to maintain an adequate and efficient force for their areas.

I can offer the further vital assurance, which I am sure the House will expect, that the maximum precepts that we are setting will allow the authorities to operate at a higher level of manpower and not merely to maintain the level of police service in their areas. The three forces concerned are currently holding vacancies for police officers. There are 164 in Greater Manchester, 53 in Merseyside and 105 in West Yorkshire. In setting the maximum precepts for these joint authorities we have specifically satisfied ourselves that, if they choose to do so, the authorities will be able to recruit up to their police officer establishments. The same is true also, incidentally, of the other three police joint authorities not covered by the order.

Both the Merseyside and West Yorkshire police joint authorities have had meetings with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and myself to discuss their anxieties about police expenditure in their areas. As a result of these representations and of others, my right hon. Friend announced this afternoon his intention to increase the rate of police grant to police authorities in 1986-87 from 50 to 51 per cent. He is doing this in recognition of the increasing demands on the police service in England and Wales as a whole, especially the need to counter drug abuse — including the setting up of drug wings in regional crime squads — public disorder costs and terrorism. The change will be of particular benefit to the police joint authorities. Under the new arrangements, Merseyside will receive an additional £2·3 million in police grant and block grant. West Yorkshire will receive £2·1 million, and Greater Manchester £3·3 million. These levels clearly exceed the differences between the precept claimed by the authorities and the maximum precepts that are set out in the order. The other police joint authorities will also benefit.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): The Minister is famous for saying during a sitting of the Committee which considered the abolition Bill, on which we both served, that no savings would be made in respect of the police, fire and civil defence services. He is trying to justify his claim that there would be no cuts in public expenditure or savings. If we accept that, where will the savings come from on the abolition of the metropolitan authorities, including Merseyside?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Gentleman's recollection is not entirely correct. I gave an assurance that the uniformed strength of the police service and the minimum stipulated levels of fire cover would not be the subject of savings. I said that savings in administration should be obtained from the changes which were to be brought about under the joint boards. Under the settlements that are before the House, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has asked for a 1·5 per cent. efficiency saving to be made by the fire and civil defence joint boards. That is a contribution that will be on its way to achieving the target of a saving of £100 million.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shaw: Indeed.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to make a point about West Yorkshire. Reference was made to the increase in the West Yorkshire precept. Will the Minister accept that West Yorkshire faces particular problems, to the extent that the police authority is demanding extra personnel? I hope that the Minister will consider those problems when the precept for the West Yorkshire constabulary is reviewed. Will he also consider the new police authority's request for an increase in the expenditure that is required to maintain a viable police force in West Yorkshire?

Mr. Shaw: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I should like to think that both he and I are at one in our commitment to a full, effective and efficient police service in West Yorkshire, which both of us are proud to represent. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are vacancies in West Yorkshire's police establishment. In the discussions between the joint authority and the Home Office, the authority asked for a higher contingency allowance in its budget to offset, for example the possible costs of a renewal of the kind of problem that it experienced during the miners' dispute. It sought a higher contingency allocation rather than additional funds for uniformed officers. The announcement that I have just made means that the police grant moves from the 50 to the 51 per cent. level. The effect in West Yorkshire will be to improve its position by £2·1 million. Its claim for additional precept was £425,000. Therefore, this evening's announcement will provide West Yorkshire with what it originally sought, and it should also enable it to reduce the maximum precept by up to 1p. That will be of immense benefit to the payers of the precept in West Yorkshire.

We attach great importance to the level of policing in the metropolitan areas. They are the major inner city areas in the country. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary looks to the new joint authorities to budget so that forces can recruit up to their police establishment in the course of the year and maintain the balance of police and civilian manpower which he will approve in their establishment and support services schemes. Because of the change announced today, they should be able to provide this level of service, and also set a precept below the maximum levels which are proposed in this order. Because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is making available a further £22 million in block grant, there will be no loss of grant for other authorities or any other services.

As far as the fire service is concerned, I and my colleagues have consistently and clearly explained the

[Mr. Shaw]

Government's policy towards the new fire and civil defence authorities, both during the passage of what is now the 1985 Act and on other occasions. I must again assure the House that we have made every effort to ensure that the fire service can be transferred to the new authorities on 1 April with its efficiency and morale undiminished. From the very early days, undertakings have been given that all existing fire brigade staff—both uniformed and civilian—would be transfered as a group by means of an order made under section 52 of the 1985 Act. This will be fulfilled on Thursday when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment lays the Local Government reorganisation (Designation of Staff) Order 1986, the provisions of which allow for the transfer of all the brigade staff, even those recruited up to that very day. We have also said that, while we believed that the fire service could be managed in a manner that would achieve greater value for money, any savings would be compatible with the 1978 pay agreement. Our proposals in the draft order are consistent with these policies. I regret that members of the fire service have not been made sufficiently aware of the adequacy and sincerity of the Government's commitment on these issues and that they have been caused needless concern by the attitude of some fire authorities and the stance taken on abolition by the largest fire service union, the Fire Brigades Union.

As hon. Members who, like me, took part in the debates on the 1985 legislation will recall, our main undertaking was, in effect, that the new authorities would be enabled to maintain broadly the level of service at present obtaining in their areas.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does the hon. Gentleman recall his undertakings during the debates on the abolition Bill that the fire service would remain at correct strength? I admit that South Yorkshire is not covered by the legislation, but it will be affected. Fire services overlap boundaries because they need to back each other up. Even after redetermination, South Yorkshire will only just be able to keep the present number of pumping appliances on the road. It is short of personnel. Before abolition the authority was trying to build up numbers. My information is that it will be short of 30 people, which will create difficulties in manning the appliances.

Mr. Shaw: I note that observation, but I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the arrangement between the Home Secretary and South Yorkshire is satisfactory. So far as I am aware, they are not in dispute about the precept that has been levelled. The hon. Gentleman is understandably concerned about how the new fire authority in South Yorkshire will distribute the resources that it is obtaining under the precept order. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be extremely concerned to ensure that the scale of appliances and the civil staff who support the fire service are at the levels required to operate efficiently. I shall look into that point and, if I find that the position in South Yorkshire is not satisfactory, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

The 1985 Act established that all the levels of service currently obtaining should obtain in the new areas. I believe that the maximum precept already with four of the new authorities meets this end and, given the political will by the new authorities to use the resources available to them with maximum efficiency and economy, this will be the position in the other three areas. Even our most determined critics cannot disguise the fact that the differences between the Government and the three services of the fire authorities with which we are not in total agreement are small—equivalent to the product of an additional precept of 0·37p in Greater Manchester, 0·64p in Merseyside and, on its own standstill budget, 0·45p in West Yorkshire.

I recognise that many hon. Members will have been subjected to lobbying or questions by those associated with the abolition authorities or the Fire Brigades Union. As a West Yorkshire Member, I have experienced the fallout from such lobbying. In the main, the lobbying has revolved around the maintenance of the nationally recommended minimum fire cover standards to which successive Home Secretaries, including my right hon. Friend, have attached such importance. That commitment was made clear during the passage of the 1985 legislation.

In West Yorkshire the new authority has accepted proposals made by the outgoing authority for creating an additional 94 whole-time posts during 1986-87 and 1987-88. It is my right hon. Friend's policy to agree to net increases in manpower for the new authorities only if he is satisfied that no compensating economies can be found. In fact, the position is that whole-time uniformed manpower in West Yorkshire has increased since the end of 1981 by 93 persons. The precept for 1986-87 permits continuation of the manpower levels which the existing authority provides.

During that year Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services will look closely at the case for increased manning of pumping appliances in the light of the recent study of fire cover in the county and will examine with the fire authority whether compensating savings can be found. Only if they cannot be found after a genuine and determined attempt by the new authority to do so will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary agree to increases in manpower. Meanwhile, I wish to assure hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), that there is no question of there having to be a deterioration in the present levels of service. The intention is that fire cover in West Yorkshire should be adequate to meet the needs of its area, and be based on a well-run and efficient fire brigade aiming for an even higher level of service.

Many hon. Members know full well the extent to which this local government reorganisation has been accompanied throughout by claims that the fire service in particular will be at risk. The GLC published reports saying that 1,400 posts were to be axed. I seem to recall that in the Committee that dealt with what is now the 1985 Act there were many occasions when claims of that order were made. There were further proposals for 10 fire stations to be closed, with 44 appliances to be withdrawn from service.

In reality, after carefully reviewing its inheritance with any eye to achieving greater effectiveness and economy, the new authority in London has submitted a fire brigade establishment incorporating a more efficient and decentralised management structure, and a reduction of 300 uniformed posts. This reduction will be achieved by natural wastage, and most significantly, in view of the scare stories which were put out at the time, not one

pumping appliance will be withdrawn from service. As I mentioned earlier, the London authority has accepted the precept announced by my right hon. Friend.

Finally, let me make clear what this order will do, and what it will not do. It will set for the six joint authorities to which it applies the maximum precept which they may make for 1986-87, but it will not fix the precept which they will actually make. That is a matter for each joint authority to decide for itself within the maximum. Nor does the order limit the discretion of the joint authorities to decide how to use their resources. It only limits the contribution that they can obtain from the ratepayer to the total resources for 1986-87. I trust that the House will agree that the police, fire and civil defence services are vital.

It is right that we should look very carefully at the representations which the joint authorities have made to us about the level of precept required. I hope that I have made it clear that we have done just that. Seven of the 13 joint authorities have agreed a maximum precept with us. Six have not, but the differences are not great. In three cases the difference is less than half a penny on the precept. Only one, and that is the West Yorkshire fire authority, to which I have made particular reference, is proposing a significant increase in manpower levels, and only in that area does the difference exceed a penny on the precept.

I assured hon. Members during the passage of the Local Government Bill that we did not intend to operate these controls in a draconian or arbitrary manner. It should be clear to the House, from the extent of the agreement that has been reached with the new authorities, that we have fulfilled that assurance.

In the light of the position, and in the light of the changes made in the police grant in particular, I trust that the House will accept the precepts. In view of the assurances that I have given, I ask the House to approve the order.

Mr. Alf Dubs (Battersea): I feel that the Minister sounded just a trifle uncomfortable and a bit on the defensive, particularly as regards the fire services. Admittedly, he has the advantage of the Home Secretary's announcement about increased money for the police, but I feel that on the question of adequate fire cover in the three particular areas covered by this order the Minister will not have convinced the whole of the House with his arguments.

What we have, after all, is a highly centralised system. We have a system under the Local Government Act and under the Rates Act, and we have a system which allows of very high control indeed through the setting of the maximum precept, or precept capping, as I think we might call it. We also have the other powers which the Government have as regards setting control over the staffing levels. This means that many decisions which should normally be made locally about essential services are now being made in Whitehall. The Government's motives have to be somewhat suspect on this.

Going back to the Committee stage of the Abolition Bill, the Minister spent a great deal of time quoting the assurances that he had given, perhaps to make up for the fact that the figures which underlie the debate tonight do not give us those assurances. The Minister said:

"There is no way in which the structural change of the authorities imposed by the Bill will alter the strength, costing and effectiveness of the fire services. In the case of the fire services, of course, it is largely because statutory duties are imposed, below which the expenditure, efficiency or equipment of the fire services cannot fall. That is why the Home Office is enabled to ensure a standard structure of fire support throughout the counties."

That seems all well and good, but doubts must remain. Indeed, the Minister was under great pressure in Committee. When he was asked to give an assurance about the £100 million savings which was explained in relation to this part of the legislation, he said:

"I doubt whether any would come from the fire services in relation to the money spent on manpower, equipment and services. There may be changes in some of the administrative support costs which will be transferred from the metropolitan counties to the joint board, as was shown in our debate earlier today on the police services." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 14 February 1985; c. 1416-7.]

I wonder whether that assurance is adequate. In Committee the present Secretary of State for the Environment, who was at that time the Minister of State, was also pressed for assurances. He said:

"I repeat what my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office said to the Committee about savings from joint boards — that the estimated £100 million rationalisation savings do not include any savings from the fire service, because we cannot expect significant savings of that kind on services which remain on a countrywide basis.

Let me also make it clear that we see scope for savings in the fire service, and we shall use the powers in clauses 64 and 80 to secure those savings."

The Minister said that manpower controls were required

"to ensure that there is not a great explosion of the bureaucratic and organisation sides of the fire and police services after abolition . . . There may well be savings to be made as a result of the manpower controls." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 21 February 1985; c. 1569.]

Those are many protestations about how the legislation will work, but the reality is contained in this order.

Time and time again the House has applauded the work of the fire service in many of the recent, tragic disasters which have struck. We well remember the Brighton bombing, the fire at Bradford football ground, and the Manchester airport disaster. On all those occasions every hon. Member, including Ministers, applauded the work of the fire service in having saved lives and property. Although the order deals with the police and civil defence, as well as the fire service, and given the Minister's earlier comments about the Home Secretary's announcement, we must be most concerned about fire services.

Regarding Greater Manchester, my figures show that there is a shortfall for fire and civil defence — civil defence is a small part of the total — of £634,000 between what the authority wanted and what the Government would allow. In addition, there is a freeze on the recruitment of officers to the fire service. There is one difficulty about the police, which is about rent allowances for police premises, about which there is a judicial review. The result is that the decision has been frozen since 1 April 1984, so there are two years' back allowance, totalling £1,600,000, which should have been set aside. It is uncertain what will happen to that once the judicial review process is complete, assuming that the estimated figures are roughly right. Nevertheless, our main anxiety must be about the shortfall for the fire services.

The Minister will say, as he has said, that these are all efficiency savings, but it is hard to see how new authorities, which have no reserves to cushion them, can achieve efficiency savings, much as the Minister would wish them to. A similar problem arises in Merseyside, where the shortfall for fire and civil defence — again,

[Mr. Alf Dubs]

fire is the main item — is £700,000. That has many implications as the Merseyside authority has clearly explained.

First, to achieve the so-called efficiency savings, the existing command and control system, which cannot be maintained adequately beyond next year, must be deferred. Secondly, there will have to be manpower reductions, which must mean a reduction in the current levels of protection provided by the brigade. Thirdly, there will have to be a deferment of the replacement of appliances already retained longer than the official replacement programme. Fourthly, there will have to be some reduction in the maintenance of buildings and the replacement of equipment.

In addition, the Merseyside fire brigade's recruitment has been frozen. For every month that that freeze continues, the lower the numbers will be. I understand that the brigade is about 90 fire officers short of the Home Office figure. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that figure.

The Minister said that the Merseyside shortfall, and others, is intended to be achieved by efficiency savings. In contrast to the assurances given in Committee, that shortfall is to be achieved through unspecified means and arbitrarily. The authority has no financial reserves or spare resources, because its resources have already been cut to the bone. I say that despite the guidance note issued by the Home Office on 23 August 1985, which states:

> "The Home Secretary pledged not to impose arbitrary spending cuts on the fire service and that such cuts had never figured in the Government's calculation of estimated rationalisation savings resulting from abolition".

The assurances given, not least the one I have quoted, are at variance with some of the figures given by the Minister a few moments ago.

A further problem on Merseyside relates to how the system operates. The Department of the Environment has such a low assessment for grant related expenditure with the result that the Merseyside police authority is denied about £23 million of block grant and therefore the cost is being passed to the ratepayer. That does not affect the money that the police can spend. It affects where it comes from, unless the Minister's announcement today, when he quoted the Home Secretary, makes a difference to that figure.

My third point relates to west Yorkshire where the shortfalls for the police appear to be £480,000. That may have been overtaken by the overall increase announced today. What is more disturbing is that there is a shortfall of £2·75 million for the fire service. That includes a small element for civil defence.

The Minister said that was a shortage of about 90 fire fighters. He talked about the possibility of the Home Office considering whether some money could be made available if savings could not be made elsewhere.

There is a significant shortfall in the amount of money judged necessary by west Yorkshire to provide adequate safety standards. The Minister asserted that everything would be all right, and then half admitted that it was not because of the shortage of about 90 fire fighters. After all that has been said about the fire service, it is rather disturbing that the Minister can brush aside some of the difficulties aside and say that things will be all right in the end.

The fire service is stretched. It is working to its limit to contain serious fires. We must expect that, sadly, there will be serious, major fires in the coming year. I am worried that we may be sending some of the brigades into the coming year with inadequate resources to do their job. The Government say that they know best. Whitehall knows better than local people about what is needed to provide for the type of safety cover that the fire brigades should provide.

The Opposition are against the order in principle. We do not believe that the services should be subject to that type of centralised decision. We are worried because we believe that there is a threat to the safety standards provided by the fire service. That is why I hope that the House will vote against the order.

11.30 pm

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I begin by declaring an interest. Unlike most well-heeled Conservative Members, my interest is not a financial one. I served for 26 years in the fire service, for more than 20 years as a member of the Fire Brigades Union, and for much of that time as an official of the union. I am now what is called an out-of-trade member, although I am not sponsored by the union. I have had experience of discussion and negotiation at every level, right up to national joint council as a member of the union's executive.

I joined the fire service in 1957. At that time the Fire Brigades Union was campaigning for a more professional attitude from Government to the fire service generally. Part of that campaign was for jobs and part for resources. I trust, therefore, that hon. Members will accept that I know a little about the subject.

For years, we sought the professional status that firemen deserve. Indeed, "Service for the Sixties," the plan drawn up in the 1960s by the union, pointed the way that the service had to take. We battled against Government Departments, chief fire officers and people who take the soft option, some of whom seem to believe that fire fighters are fodder, smoke-eaters who can get on with the job however bad the conditions.

Over the years, the Fire Brigades Union, despite opposition from Government and chief officers, has campaigned for a more efficient fire service, and much of that campaign has been on behalf of the general public. That efficiency has largely been achieved, but it has involved lockouts, dismissals and demonstrations on the part of firemen, not only for the good of the service but out of their commitment to the communities they serve. That dedication has resulted in firemen losing life and limb.

Against that background, I warn the House to beware some of the steps that the Government are proposing. It has taken tragedy, sometimes the loss of firemen's lives as well as the loss of life among the general public, to persuade Governments of all persuasions to act in the best interests of the public.

In the modern fire service, with sophisticated equipment, it is no longer a question of a couple of guys in the back of a wagon squirting water on flames. We must have highly trained men with the right appliances and equipment. Unfortunately, the finance that the Government are making available goes nowhere to meet that need.

I have been told that there are 89 vacancies in the Merseyside fire service and that, in the view of the Government, the money being made available should enable fire protection in the area to be broadly maintained. "Broadly" is a broad word to use. Originally, the Government intended to cut Merseyside's fire service budget by £1·8 million. That was reduced to £1·2 million. We in Merseyside, in the face of opposition from local Liberals and Tories, appealed for a redetermination and got the reduction lowered to £729,000.

That figure represents a loss of 80 jobs in the Merseyside fire brigade, in addition to the 89 that have already been lost, making a loss of 169 jobs among firemen in an area which is suffering great unemployment problems. About 80 per cent. of the budget for the service goes in wages. That must mean further job losses.

What will be the position following the disbandment of the metropolitan districts? The Liverpool revenue budget projection calls for £274 million. That represents an increase for local ratepayers of 16 per cent. The district's old expenditure projection amounted to £284 million. Thus, we are already £10 million down on what we really need. The district's new projected expenditure is £30 million down on what the Government are allowing for Liverpool. The figures show the difficulties that are in store.

In October last year at the Tory party conference the Prime Minister stated that the Government do not intend to economise and are not interested in doing so when life or property are involved. We do not take those weasel words at face value. The hypocrisy that the Government pursue in all their policies affects ordinary people and the services that they rely on.

We saw pictures in the paper and on television of the chairman of the Tory party with good old fireman Fred. He was saying what wonderful jobs the firemen were doing. After the Bradford disaster we heard the plaudits for the firemen. Recently, when the now deposed right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) was Home Secretary, he spoke at the chief fire officers conference. In line with Government policy, he referred to the future fire service having to become more cost-effective. He spoke of

"the fire service not being exempt from the rigorous financial scrutiny which has to be applied to all Local Authority services."

That is the reality of what the Government are about.

In 1980, the Government sought to cut the standards of fire cover. The Fire Brigades Union, which they seek to denigrate, instituted a full inquiry into standards of fire cover. Despite that inquiry, the Government are hellbent on justifying reductions in the fire service. The previous Home Secretary's speech was made within 15 days of the dust settling at Brighton. So much for the Government's commitment to the fire services.

Tonight, at the same time as cutting the fire service, the police are getting their screw. They will receive additional money for bullets, riot shields and water cannon, but they will receive no co-operation from the fire service in the use of such apparatus.

The Fire Brigades Union estimates that about 1,800 jobs will be lost in the fire service as a direct result of the Government's financial constraints. In Merseyside in 1984, the Merseyside brigade attended 42,000 fire calls and saved 158 human beings. That is the highest rate in the country. If the Government seek efficiency, the job done by Merseyside in saving lives is the most efficient. We are now 89 men down on establishment. The chief officer has been instructed to recruit up to establishment but he cannot guarantee a lifetime career to the young men coming into the service. Those young men in Liverpool and on Merseyside are the backbone for the future. They go through stringent entry examinations and they must be intelligent to deal with sophisticated techniques, but they are given no confidence in the fact that their jobs will be there for the future.

Liverpool has lost 65,000 jobs since the Government came to power. That has provoked despair, frustration and anger, which has led to riots in the inner city areas. The firemen have been in the front line of those battles. The fire service's role has nothing to do with quelling civil disturbances. The service is there to preserve life and property. We demand from the Government the correct expenditure to carry out our function.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) mentioned the control of the fire service—the dispatch of appliances and manpower to fight fires. That control on Merseyside needs a facelift to the tune of £1·8 million. How will the budget pay for that? The appliance replacement programme has been mentioned. Eight fire engines have already gone over the time limit laid down before they should have been put out of the service as surplus to requirements.

In the 1970s we negotiated with the chief officer a stand still on establishment while, with the financial restraints of the then Labour Government, we brought up the fleet to a proper level to deal with the needs of the people of the Merseyside area. We regained our establishment only through the good offices of a Labour Government and the struggle of the Fire Brigades Union to maintain standards.

We must understand what will happen when Merseyside county council is abolished. Before the 1975 reorganisation, we had what were called ghost establishments, where things were kept quiet and posts were not filled. We had two appliances manned by one crew. When they needed a turntable ladder, the men on the pump would jump onto the turntable ladder. That is what we inherited, and we fear that that is the prospect for the future, with the reduction in manning and in the service that the union and the men wish to provide to ordinary people.

The Fire Brigades Union understands what this is about. We agree with what the Home Secretary said recently — that we are no different from any other service. Indeed, we are no different from the cuts in the hospital service, or from the cuts in social benefit and welfare; we are no different from the cuts imposed on pensioners and one-parent families. We understand why, despite what the Secretary of State said, those cuts will be made, jobs will be lost in the fire service and the cover to ordinary people will be reduced. It will be caused by the crisis in the system which the Government control.

The Government cannot match society's needs with its resources. Recently, Parliament debated the Channel tunnel, on which millions of pounds will be spent—some of it public money. The Government can spend money on weapons of destruction, but they cannot spend money on preserving lives and property through proper investment in the fire service. Nor will they protect lives by providing finance in the Health Service for dialysis machines.

It is ludicrous to expect firemen to become involved in civil defence. It is a confidence trick and a hoax, and the

[Mr. Terry Fields]

Government will meet resistance from the Fire Brigades Union in this respect. I read nothing in the Estimates about the luminous paint that will be put on fire engines, and the chalk marks on firemen's backs, so that when a hostile nation sends across its nuclear weapons, firemen will be in a sanitised area. But that is what the Government are talking about in civil defence. The union is on record at last year's annual conference as reaffirming its policy of not going down that road.

The Minister was right to denigrate the Fire Brigades Union, as other Ministers have denigrated other unions prepared to fight for jobs for their industry and for the service that they provide to the community. The union has called several demonstrations; I spoke at one at Liverpool attended by 6,000 firemen, and we have had similar demonstrations at Manchester and Sheffield. Next week, we shall have a demonstration and lobby here in London. We wish only to draw attention to the problems of working people, but we give the Government a warning. At the Fire Brigades Union conference last week, the general secretary, winding up a debate calling for industrial action to defend jobs, said clearly that, at the first sign of a job lost in the fire service as a direct result of the Government's policies, conference would be recalled and the Fire Brigades Union national executive would recommend industrial action in defence of those jobs and in defence of services.

Firemen do not indulge lightly in such activities, but they will do it with the same commitment as they have to saving lives. We had to do it in 1977 on behalf of the community, to protect jobs and services and get the decent fire service to which people were entitled. We have fought hard to maintain standards in the fire service, and I believe that the young firemen who have joined recently will not easily give up their jobs and the decent standards of living for which they fought. Young firemen have gone through seven years of Tory policies; they have seen the social fabric destroyed and the economic base destroyed. People living in Merseyside have seen daily the results of the Government's policy—and they know that no one is safe under the Government, whether it be the ambulance service or anyone else. Even today, I heard reports from Liverpool that overspending by the ambulance department of Merseyside county council has meant that some ambulances are not running.

History has repeated itself for the fire service several times. The demonstrations in which the Fire Brigades Union has been involved throughout the decades have warned the public of the danger that there will be fewer fire fighters and appliances, slower attendance time, more severe fires, more property destroyed and many more deaths. This is not alarmist. This is the reality of the natural consequences of what the Government are doing. We give warning that the dedication and self-sacrificing attitudes of firemen—qualities to which the Government pay lip service—will be exercised and prominent in thwarting the Government in yet another attack on the British people and a group of workers such as those in the Fire Brigades Union. The Government had better watch out. If they are looking for an easy touch in cutting away the fire service as they have done everything else, they are in a for a big surprise. The Fire Brigades Union will not stand idly by and watch that happen.

11.45 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The debate started with a shadow creeping in behind the Minister, in the form of the Secretary of State for the Environment, who said not many years ago—I quote again the words that were quoted to him so often when the Minister was in Committee last year—

"In recent years there has been an increasing direction by central government over local government."

As the Minister will recall, our opposition in principle to the Local Government Act, and the rate capping that followed it, was that it was left to him and his colleagues to decide how much should be spent in the authorities created by that legislation.

We will all welcome the Minister's announcement of the additional 50 to 51 per cent. increase in grant to the police authorities in question. The additional £6 million is welcome. However, this is another example of the Government bringing in an announcement in an inappropriate way. The answer should have come in time for the debate, in a written answer form, so that hon. Members do not have to rely on hearsay or the Minister's announcement at the beginning of the debate. I ask him to take that point back to the Government. It is an inappropriate use of the power and the discretion of government to come up with a rabbit out of the hat at the last moment. We are glad of the money, but there are better ways to use Parliament and its procedures than to make announcements at midnight, when the debate is about to start.

The Minister said that this year there would be, as a result of the rate support grant settlement, an extra £22 million in block grant. It would be helpful if he could make it clear whether that applies to the three metropolitan counties that feature in the order, or the six metropolitan authorities, or the seven if the GLC is included. The figures are difficult enough in block grant terms, let alone the other problems about close ending and recycling.

As I understand it, the share of block grant, not the net figures—this applies to the funding of services such as the fire, police, the civil defence and the like—is marginally down, not up, this year. I understand that the figure for last year, is that 32·2 per cent. of what was given out to the counties of England was given to the metropolitan counties for services such as this, whereas this year the figure is down to 31·6 per cent. The second point is that the whole system is now increasingly difficult to plan for and manage in budget terms. I hope that the Minister will accept that now in February 1986, we cannot tell what moneys will go to these six authorities in the coming year, because there may be some grant recycling in the Department of the Environment, which has produced some speculative figures based on a £400 million sum. That means that there is enormous scope for adding to the figures and that treasurers cannot know how much will be made available to them in the coming year.

I understand that, when the Minister and some of his colleagues met deputations from some of the authorities including the Minister's, Ministers made it clear that it was estimated that there would be no significant charge to the ratepayer. That is not so. I understand that West Yorkshire gets £510 million of grant from the Government in 1985-86. After abolition, on 1 April, the districts and boards will get £486 million. If the districts and boards spent to the Government's guidelines, they would need

£89 million more than last year, but they are getting £24 million less. There is a shortfall of £113 million. The only way in which to raise that is by going to the ratepayer. That is one of the sets of figures that the Minister has to disprove if he is to establish that abolition and the new format for the police, fire and civil defence authorities will not present a net cost and disadvantage to ratepayers.

There is also an intrinsic contradiction in the system. The Minister and his colleagues set an expenditure limit, which is their assessment of need. Down the road in Marsham street, a grant-related assessment is set. There is often a substantial difference between the two. Is it not about time that we got an agreed figure? If the police, fire and civil defence authorities had to follow the GREAs, they would overspend grossly if they followed the Minister's expenditure limit and would lose grant because of it. It cannot be right for one Department to assess need at £50 million, and for the Home Office to say that it is £63 million, for example.

The figures this year, as before, increasingly do not work. That makes it even more difficult for authorities to plan — and they already have to contend with rate capping. Will the Minister undertake to consider a system that gives an agreed Government figure so that local authorities are not penalised because one figure is less than another? One of the problems that the different figures create is that, as the figures are revised during the year, it is even more difficult, because of the paraphernalia of legislation, to make proper advance planning of services. All that would have been solved if the amendment that I moved in Committee had been accepted, and rate capping had not applied. It was not, and we live to rue the day.

Is the Minister aware that Greater Manchester's assessment for fire and civil defence is that there will be a shortfall of about £634,000 in the next 12 months? As for the police authority there, what can the Minister tell us about the resolution of the question of the outstanding rent allowances? I understand that that sum is causing the difference of view between Greater Manchester and the Home Office. It must be resolved if there is not to be a shortfall of about £2 million in the next year.

Does the Minister agree that, in Merseyside, the ratepayer will pay more in the coming year for the same services than this year under the county council? That does not accord with what the Government promised. They want law and order to be sustained, but they are charging the ratepayer more. Where, then, lies the proof that abolition is saving money? I believe that it is costing money, as we have always said.

As to the police authority in Merseyside, my information is that a grant of £22·5 million or thereabouts will be forthcoming based on expenditure at the grant-related expenditure assessment level, yet the redetermination that the Home Secretary went through, which is clearly of benefit, gave a figure of 28 per cent. over and above that, not allowing for all that to be paid in grant, which results in a grant loss because of the excess of expenditure even within the expenditure limit over and above the grant-related amount of expenditure. That is clearly a disadvantage to the policing of Merseyside. Can the Minister explain what he expects the authority to do, given that it is being penalised in this way?

Taking last the Minister's own authority of west Yorkshire, that gives the best example, I hope he will accept, of the ludicrousness of the figures. The Department of the Environment says that just over £50 million is required by the police authority in west Yorkshire. The redetermined expenditure limit according to the Home Office is £63 million. Which is it? Presumably the Minister will stand by his own figures, in which case he has to tell his colleagues down the road that £50 million is wrong, £63 million is right and there should, therefore, be no discrepancy between the two. I understand that the chief constable said that he wanted slightly more even than the higher expenditure level. That means that even now the authority will be squeezed. If that is right, and the authority had accepted the Department of the Environment figures, there would have been a substantial loss of police establishment — and we are talking of hundreds, if not thousands, of officers. Clearly that will not happen, because I think even the Home Office figures the position remains that west Yorkshire says it needs 100 extra police officers. Will it get them? If so, who will pay?

The conclusion, after considering the specifics, is that the Government rightly say that law and order and services for upholding the security of our metropolitan communities and for security from fire have to be preserved. What they are now having to tell the ratepayer is: we will set the level at which you have to keep the services, but we will ask you to pay more—our new system is going to cost you. Is that really honouring the promises that were made when the legislation was introduced?

Mr. Giles Shaw: The main points raised by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) related to the Merseyside and Greater Manchester fire authorities.

The new Merseyside fire authority applied for an expenditure level in 1986-87 of £28·5 million. The maximum precept of 7·19p described in the draft order implies an expenditure of £28·1 million. I accept that the hon. Gentleman is correct and that this represents a shortfall. The shortfall will be absorbed by a gradual reduction in the establishment of some 60 firemen posts achieved solely by natural wastage. This can be achieved with no significant change in the service provided to Merseyside, and will help to keep down the rates.

Mr. Terry Fields: The Minister is telling us that we will lose 60 posts in a brigade which has a record of the highest number of fire calls and the greatest saving of life with no lowering of standards. That is a ludicrous statement. A cut in the level of service provided to the people of Liverpool will mean greater potential danger to life and property in the Merseyside area.

Mr. Shaw: I understand the hon. Gentleman's total and laudable commitment to the fire brigades and his great experience of operating within that service, but it is essential that joint boards or shire county authorities which are seeking a given level of expenditure for police and fire services should provide evidence that they can run their services efficiently. That is what ratepayers wish to see —that the services supplied are appropriate to meet the minimum standards of fire cover laid down by the service itself and endorsed by the fire inspectorate. That is the way the services have traditionally been run and I am sure the hon. Gentleman would wish them to continue in that way.

The hon. Member for Battersea also referred to Greater Manchester. The precept level prescribed in the draft order will not present the new authority with difficulties. The limit of 9·52p implies expenditure of £41 million, which is 0·6 per cent. less than the authority applied for. In

[Mr. Shaw]

fairness, I think the hon. Gentleman said that that was the shortfall, but the prescribed limit represents an 8·5 per cent. increase on the budget of the existing authority for 1985-86 at outturn prices and a hefty 22 per cent. increase on the 1984-85 figures of actual expenditure. The fire service in Greater Manchester has continued to grow substantially.

The hon. Member for Battersea referred too to the position in West Yorkshire, as did the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). In my opening remarks, I did not go into great detail on the police service in West Yorkshire. I think that, on the whole, the House was satisfied with what I said. There are the shortfalls in the fire service in West Yorkshire that the hon. Member for Battersea suggests. Of course, I have already said that there will be a review this year by HM inspectorate in West Yorkshire to see whether efficiency savings can be made. If they can be achieved without any loss of fire cover, that is a reasonable aim. If not, my right hon. Friend will review the position at the end of the year.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) has substantial experience with the fire service and I understand how he feels about a precept which does not provide the level of expenditure which he wishes to see on Merseyside. Under the legislation, for the first three years, and for three years only, the Home Secretary has the unique power to set the maximum precept. He will discharge that duty with thoroughness and efficiency. There are many competing sources of expenditure within local government and none more so than in the metropolitan districts. The hon. Gentleman will know that it is up to Government to ensure that the services are all funded properly and efficiently but not extravagantly. *[Interruption.]* I hear the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He will know full well that no one in the House, and certainly not I, would resile for one minute from supporting the fire brigades in what they do. The gentlemen who man the fire brigades and the men and women who are involved in the support services have provided an astonishing level of service during the last year.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey raised some broader issues. He must not expect me to respond on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made an announcement earlier today on the block grant, because he had a direct interest in providing the House with the necessary information to debate the fire and police services tonight. That was the quickest means available to him. I have told the House what he has decided.

The £22 million to which I referred will be spread over all local authorities. The joint boards which are the subject of the precept order will not be the only beneficiaries, although they will benefit the most because they are the largest authorities responsible for police and fire services. Each county will also benefit in its own way from the block grant of £22 million being made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

London will be a major beneficiary of the changes announced today. It will benefit by about £17·8 million from the increase in the police grant which has been provided for today. I say to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that all authorities will benefit but, largely, the benefit will go to the areas we are discussing—the joint board areas for fire and police.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey contrasted the assessments made in the Home Office expenditure levels for police and the assessments under grant-related expenditure — the regime applied by the Department of the Environment. I respect and understand why he should make that point. The hon. Gentleman will equally know that, under the Act, whereby the Home Secretary has the power to set the maximum precept levels, he will operate that for three years only; whereas GRE or the funding of local authorities, is continuing, although it has changed from time to time. The announcement today went some way towards recognising the principle of what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said.

If two policies are clearly directed for their own perfectly legitimate ends—one to encourage a rate of police expenditure, the other to determine the grant-related expenditure, which is not a specific amount of money related to police needs but an equalisation of policing needs, the two figures are not easily shown to be compatible. It is to start to close that gap that the announcement was made today, first in relation to a block grant increase and secondly in relation to a 1 per cent. increase in the police grant. Although the announcement is in respect of 1986-87, I think that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and the House will conclude that it may be difficult to change the police grant back from 51 per cent. to 50 per cent. in subsequent years. That is a decision about which my right hon. Friend will have to consult his colleagues.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey raised the matter of the Greater Manchester rent allowance in relation to the police. I agree that there is a problem but I believe that it has now been resolved. I understand that when the authority asked for its maximum precept to be increased to allow extra expenditure on back rent allowance, we agreed after consideration that it could fund that allowance within existing precept levels. That is why we made no change.

In addition to the points that I have already made I must emphasise that under the revised precept level there should be no doubt that police recruitment in West Yorkshire should enable vacancies — currently about 130 on establishment—to be filled. I hope that it will be able to move to that in the coming year.

My right hon. Friend has invited the chief constables of the provincial forces to conduct a review of police establishment needs. Where a need for additional establishment can be proven beyond doubt, my right hon. Friend has agreed to ask the inspectorate to advise him whether the needs should be met. I expect that such assessment will take place during the current month, so it is continuing.

The debate has been pertinent to the order. It has been a matter of reviewing how the mechanism will work. I trust that what I have been able to tell the House is sufficient to persuade hon. Members to allow the precept order to pass.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 118.

Division No. 69] **[12.10 am**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harvey, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Key, Robert
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lamont, Norman
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'lich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Freud, Clement
George, Bruce
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sean Hughes and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

Passenger Transport Authorities'

12.19 am

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): I beg to move,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Passenger Transport Authorities) (Prescribed Maximum) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

The House will know that in a few weeks time the six metropolitan counties will pass largely unmourned into history. Their public transport activities will be carried on by new joint boards made up of representatives from each of the districts within the former metropolitan counties. Under the Local Government Act 1985, these joint boards were designated for precept control for their first three years. This means that the Secretary of State for Transport sets an upper limit on the amounts which the new joint board passenger transport authorities may charge local ratepayers.

The Government have sought agreement with the new joint boards as to their maximum precepts for 1986-87. Agreement has been reached with the West Midlands and with Tyne and Wear joint boards, but we have not found it possible to achieve this in Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. The order laid before the House on 29 January therefore sets an upper limit for the precept of those four authorities. We have had several months of discussion with the joint boards about the appropriate level of their expenditure in 1986-87. The order before the House is the outcome of those discussions and the consequences of the failure of four of the six metropolitan counties to reach agreement with the Government on their maximum precept.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I explained a little of the background to these differences of view. Until not so long ago, the typical traveller paid for public transport through the fare box. People paid for their bus tickets, and so on, in much the same way as they paid for their food or their clothes or any other expenditure which they chose to undertake. But in recent years the practice has grown up of subsidising bus operators to run bus routes which did not have sufficient passengers to be viable, and, in addition, some authorities have given subsidies to the bus operators to reduce their fares below the economic cost.

It is possible to compare the amount of this subsidy in different parts of the United Kingdom in a form which adjusts for differences in population by looking at the cost per person in different counties. For example, in Oxfordshire public transport subsidies amount to £2 per person per year, to provide concessionary fares to certain groups and bus services to communities which would otherwise be isolated. Looking across the counties of England, one can see a number of counties where the amount per person spent in subsidising bus services is somewhat greater.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Minister admit that in counties such as South Yorkshire the electors have shown time after time, by voting Labour, that they entirely approve of the transport policies of those local authorities? Why does the hon. Gentleman not put it to the test and let the people decide at the ballot box?

Mr. Mitchell: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to complete my argument, he will find that I cover that point. One can ascertain the amount of expenditure in different counties on a comparable basis. Expenditure per person on subsidising bus services is £2 in Oxfordshire, £3 in Warwickshire, £6 in Hampshire and £13 in Lancashire. Some authorities have taken this to ridiculous lengths. For example, the expenditure on transport per head of the population in West Yorkshire is £23—compared with £2 in Oxfordshire—in Greater Manchester it is £30, in Merseyside it is £53 and in South Yorkshire it is £60. This is paid by the ratepayer. This is a degree of extravagance which has expremely unfortunate consequences for the ratepayers. In West Yorkshire last year the total rate in the pound—county plus districts—was 209p. In Manchester the figure was 228p, in Merseyside 246p, and in South Yorkshire 269p.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Minister realise that when the cheaper fares policy was introduced by the Labour-controlled Merseyside county council in 1981 the Liverpool stores committee was wholly against it, but when it saw the upturn in passenger users it was wholly in favour of the cheap fares policy—and those people are not used to voting Labour?

Mr. Mitchell: Any store that is to have its customers brought to its door at a subsidised rate will be in favour of that. What would the hon. Gentleman expect? The position here is that the shire counties' average is 181p in the pound, whereas for South Yorkshire it is 269p in the pound as a result of this extravagant expenditure.

That is not all of the story. Each of these metropolitan counties, in a rake's progress of expenditure, was spending its reserves as if money had gone out of fashion last year, so that people living in those areas enjoyed the benefit of cheap fares at a cost far in excess of the income of the authority. It is like someone blowing his life savings and living the life of Riley, which can go on only until the savings have run out and the party is over. That is the situation in the metropolitan counties. The party is over.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Does the Minister agree that if he ratecaps the Merseyside passenger transport authority, and if it takes over Liverpool airport, which loses money, it will have the choice of either closing the airport or of subsidising it, as a consequence of which it will have to cut its bus services, because it does not have the money to do both? Does that not mean that Liverpool airport is likely to close unless it is subsidised? If it is not subsidised, bus services will not be provided in Merseyside. Does the Minister want Liverpool airport to close?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman knows that decisions about priorities are for the PTA. It is not for Ministers to lay down what should be done.

I can well understand the hon. Gentleman seeking to intervene when he did, because I was just about to draw attention to the extent to which local authorities in those areas overspent their income last year and drew on their reserves. The spending of the county council and PTE reserves in 1985-86 was equivalent to an additional precept of 27p in West Yorkshire, 22p in Greater Manchester, 23p in Merseyside and 21p in South Yorkshire. In short, last year the expenditure was much greater than the income, and this year the ratepayers are paying according to what is spent. That is why so many screams are coming from certain quarters.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Is it the Minister's argument that because the people of West Yorkshire and other counties have voted for this sort of passenger transport system he feels that he is justified in taking it away, and that what he really wants to do on the figures that he has quoted is to reduce the quality of service, so that what we receive in the metropolitan counties will be equivalent to what is received in the shire counties? The Minister's argument is not about levelling up or about saving the ratepayer, it is about cutting services. Why does he not have the courage to admit that to the House?

Mr. Mitchell: I am far more concerned about striking a proper balance between the interests of bus travellers and ratepayers. Ratepayers have been raped in so many places that it is high time they received a square deal.

Hon. Members may ask why a local authority should seek to spend on such a colossal scale compared with the level of expenditure in other parts of the country, and the answer is simply that Left-wing politicians realise that bus travellers have votes, but that those who pick up the rate bill often do not. It was cheap for councillors to spend extravagantly on subsidising the voters' bus services, and they saw little disadvantage in pursuing the policy, since many of the ratepayers would be businesses, which do not have votes. It was cheap and nasty—cheap for the politicians, and nasty for the ratepayer. Unfortunately for them and the country, many such businesses can vote with their feet, and have done so. They have left constituencies and areas where high rates make it difficult to start a business.

Mr. Allan Roberts *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. Businesses have a life cycle. They start with people with new ideas, products, zest and enthusiasm. The grow, create employment, grow old, tired and staid, and, often, die. Their place is taken by new businesses, with new ideas, employing new people. In the metropolitan counties, because of the high level of rates, few new businesses have been started. The result is that we have the burden of unemployment in areas where that should not be so, and it has a significant effect.

Mr. Roberts: The right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival), the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) and I represent the lowest rated metropolitan district. With such low rates and a Conservative council which has cut services to the bone and kept rates low, can the Minister explain why Sefton has a 30 per cent. unemployment rate and businesses are leaving the area? If rates drive businesses away, why should that be the case?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will know that it is not merely the district rate, but the amount levied by the metropolitan county, which has caused high rates and driven businesses away. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. I remind the House, especially hon. Members wishing to catch my eye, and hon. Members making interventions that this is a short debate.

Mr. Mitchell: The result is that unemployment has remained desperately high in those areas. The Government should not wash their hands of the matter. One of the important reasons for the order is that we are starting on the process of reducing the burden on ratepayers in metropolitan counties so that gradually there will be a better prospect for securing an increase in job creation and employment opportunities for those who live in those areas.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I have given way several times, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

By the order the Government seek to set a maximum for the precept that may be charged by four of the six new joint board PTAs. The maximum precepts are set out in the schedule to the order as follows: Greater Manchester 19·99p, Merseyside 44·8½p, South Yorkshire 44·07p, and West Yorkshire 26·51p. Total expenditure levels, which we determined in December are only some 3 per cent., in real terms, below the equivalent budgeted metropolitan county council expenditure this year, but that expenditure has been supplemented by some £35 million of PTE reserves. The underlying reduction in expenditure is more than 3 per cent. There is a long way to go, but the ratepayers can take hope from the fact that we are engaged in a programme which over three years will bring them to a more reasonable level of expenditure on transport services, and those thinking of setting up in business, and those who would be employed by firms starting in business, can look forward to more jobs as the rate burdens cease to distract and destroy business starting in the area.

We have also provided some immediate help to reduce the burden falling on ratepayers in the metropolitan counties in 1986-87. The additional police grant announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will provide some significant assistance. In addition, I should remind the House that in announcing the rate support grant settlement for the next financial year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment stressed that any consequences of abolition would be subject to a safety net. This ensures that the total burden on ratepayers in the metropolitan areas is no greater as a result of abolition than it would have been if the metropolitan counties had continued to exist.

Mr. Wareing: That is not true.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman says that that is not true. It is true. He may be deceiving himself, because he has failed to take account of the £35 million of reserves which were blown last year in sustaining expenditure higher than the income received by the authorities.

Mr. Wareing: If the ratepayers will be better off under the system which the Minister is introducing, how much block grant will be paid to the joint boards for transport next year?

Mr. Mitchell: I have given the figures for the precept set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I should put that more correctly and say "the maximum precept" set by my right hon. Friend.

I recognise that the precepts that we are setting, despite those measures, are higher than we would have wished. However, the ratepayers would do well to contemplate how much larger the bill might have been had the authorities been able to continue their fantastic policies without restraint. The charge in Merseyside, for example, would have been 58p, or nearly 30 per cent. higher than

[Mr. Mitchell]

we propose that the authority should be allowed to spend. South Yorkshire would have needed a truly enormous precept of 66p—half as much again as will be required under our policies.

Instead of those grotesque amounts, we confidently expect that by the end of the three years of precept control metropolitan ratepayers will be enjoying the benefits of much reduced charges. The long-term benefits should do much to stimulate and revive the ailing economies of those areas. I commend the order to the House.

12.37 am

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I have no doubt that in your long experience in the House and in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have heard many remonstrations from the Opposition about the way in which we conduct our business. I do not wish to disappoint you this evening. We know of no other country whose Parliament would be debating the future funding of its public transport system at about 12.35 am for a maximum of one and a half hours.

I wish it to be firmly understood by the House, the Secretary of State and the Minister of State that the Opposition think that the procedure of introducing a statutory instrument whose contents have massive and wide-ranging consequences for millions of our people who use public transport every day is completely unacceptable.

To allow time for my hon. Friends who represent areas affected by the order, I shall not make a long and detailed critique of the Government's proposals. My hon. Friends will spell out in precise terms what it means for their county council areas.

Having spent a year of my life opposing the provisions of the Transport Act 1985 and having been locked in political and intellectual conflict with the Secretary of State—although for him the latter was hard—and with the Minister of State during the passage of that measure through the House, it gives me no pleasure to report that what my hon. Friends and I said at that time has proved to be true.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): The hon. Gentleman talks of intellectual conflict. If his intellect does not tell him that the order before the House is made under the abolition measure and arises out of local government legislation and has nothing whatever to do with the Transport Act 1985, his intellect is sadly lacking.

Mr. Stott: If I had time, I would rebut that intervention. Regrettably, I do not have the time, so I will ignore it.

The deregulation of Britain's bus industry, allied to the abolition of the metropolitan counties, will prove to be a disaster. With the perspicacity of an ostrich, the Secretary of State continued to pursue the ludicrous idea that the free market could be visited on public transport, unfettered and without constraint.

Some of us suspected the real motives that lay behind the Transport Act 1985. That measure was simply a parliamentary vehicle by which the Secretary of State could reduce the Revenue support for public transport in the UK. Our worst fears about that measure are coming to fruition.

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): I recall the passage of the 1985 Act.

Mr. Tony Banks: Did the hon. Gentleman come by bus?

Mr. Parris: If reference is being made to the fact that I am wearing a dinner jacket, I am dressed in this fashion because I have been to the annual dinner of the Bus and Coach Council, where I sat next to Councillor Alec Waugh from South Yorkshire county council——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions to speeches must be brief.

Mr. Parris: —who was wearing a considerably more expensive dinner jacket than I. I recall the hours of debate on the 1985 measure and the intellectual content. This order, however, does not derive from that measure, and I am still waiting to hear the hon. Gentleman's case.

Mr. Stott: I, too, attended the Bus and Coach Council annual dinner. I discarded my dinner jacket for this debate. If the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) will remain in his place, I will educate him into the reasons why the Transport Act 1985 and the order are closely linked.

The order sets out the precept limits placed on the metropolitan counties of Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Merseyside. Tyne and Wear accepted the Government's original proposal. The only passenger transport authority for which a change has been made is the West Midlands PTA. The change results only from a technicality—a product of a penny rate used by the Department of the Environment, which has been miscalculated. All the PTAs, except those that I have just mentioned, have appealed against the decision, because of the severe damage that will be inflicted on their areas.

We are debating the amount of revenue, via a punitive GRE settlement, with which all the metropolitan counties must operate this year and early next year. South Yorkshire is represented this evening by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn). I hope that he will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During the past ten years, South Yorkshire has consistently returned a Labour-controlled county council that has administered a public transport system second to none in the world. As a consequence of the order—if the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West would pay attention—South Yorkshire will suffer horrendous job losses, route closures and fare increases.

The same can be said for the county of West Yorkshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will make that clear. As a direct result of the order, West Yorkshire envisages that in rural areas some communities could lose their service completely and Sunday services would be considerably reduced. Early morning services in suburban areas would be restricted and evening services would be limited.

In my county of Greater Manchester — my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) will have something to say later if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the passenger transport executive has said that as a consequence of deregulation and the provisions in the order, 2,000 busmen and women will be made redundant, routes will be cut, and fares will be increased by 15 per cent.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Will the hon. Gentleman put the matter into perspective? All those job

losses will come from what is inappropriately termed natural wastage. No-one will be put on the scrap heap. Already, people have applied to the authority to be included on the redundancy list.

Mr. Stott: People may be applying for retirement or early redundancy, but I do not accept the premise of the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg). A considerable number of people will be forced into redundancy against their will as a result of the provisions.

That is the Greater Manchester executive's estimate, which has been demonstrated to the hon. Gentleman and to all hon. Members who represent that area. The figure of 2,000 is similar to that in other areas of the United Kingdom where the implications of the order will come to fruition.

Mr. Mitchell: Does the hon. Gentleman deny that more than 2,000 people have already applied voluntarily for redundancy?

Mr. Stott: I do not believe that that is the case. The Greater Manchester transport executive—so far, these are the management figures—has told me and other hon. Members who represent that area that in its view, as a consequence of the order and bus deregulation there will be 2,000 less jobs. Even if those jobs are lost as a consequence of voluntary redundancy, it still means a net loss of 2,000 jobs in an area of high unemployment.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The loss of 2,000 jobs there, and the 1,600 scheduled to go in South Yorkshire, are not only jobs but services. Those people drive buses. If they go, what will happen to the rural services in my constituency, such as those to Silkstone and Dumford Hazelhead? I know what will happen: there will be no buses.

Mr. Stott: Had we had a full and proper debate on the matter this evening, I have no doubt that my hon. Friend could have made those points in far greater detail. However, he has managed to get them on the record in this limited time.

I shall not discuss Merseyside, since I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) will do that, should he catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, I should point out that Merseyside gets no block grant. Under this order not one penny piece will go to Merseyside. It might get a few bob through surreptitious means, but the great conurbation of Merseyside will not get a penny under this order.

We are witnessing what my hon. Friends and I predicted in Committee. We are beginning to see job losses, poor services and the withdrawal of rural routes. There will be higher rates, because the ratepayers will have to pay for this, as a consequence of the transitional period and the redundancies that will be caused. As a result of the uncertainty in the bus market, which has been created by the Secretary of State, no one is buying buses and the bus manufacturing industry is in the doldrums. That is a direct consequence of the Transport Act 1984. I attended the Bus and Coach Council's annual dinner earlier this evening, with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West. We did not have the advantage of having *Hansard* writers at that dinner, but I was sitting not too far away from the Secretary of State when he addressed the dinner. If I do not have his words right, I will apologise to him; but if they are right, it is worth hearing what he said. He told the Bus and Coach Council:

> "You are now free to run your businesses without the constraint of a social conscience."

Mr. Parris: That is a misinterpretation.

Mr. Stott: If I have misinterpreted the Secretary of State, I shall be the first to apologise to him. But that is what I wrote down, and that is what I believe he said. That was precisely the motivation behind the Transport Act 1985 and this order. One and a half hours in which to debate Britain's transport policy and the movement of millions of people is an utter disgrace. I need not ask my hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby; I know that they will do it.

12.53 am

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): May I take a few minutes to try to bring the debate back to reality by relating it to my constituents? In Merseyside, there have been no fare increases since 1980; indeed, there have been decreases. No doubt that suits many people, especially those who do not pay rates, and I do not blame them for saying, "For goodness sake, reduce the fares even further". My constituents, who are not all wealthy people, bitterly resent—I agree with them—being forced to contribute money to allow others to travel at ridiculously uneconomic prices. [*Interruption.*] I see that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) does not like what I am saying. I am glad that he does not, because it proves that I am making a point.

Last year, the council disguised this move by taking £8 million to £10 million—one cannot tell quite how much, because it is all covered up—out of reserves. That was done deliberately so that this year, following on abolition, the rates would have to go up by an equivalent amount. Let us cut the cackle and look at the facts. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh—what is so funny about that? I feel about my constituents as I feel about my Government—I want to do my duty to both. The hon. Member for West Derby should keep quiet. I know that he does not like what I am saying, but why should my constituents, who are no better off than many of his, contribute to the travel of his constituents? They resent being forced to do that because they are in the minority in the district council, and have no control over the profligate spending of the Labour authority. They are grateful to my right hon. and hon. Friends for putting a limit on the waste of money, the cost of which falls on their heads.

If the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), who had a cackle and then went away, thinks that such measures do not affect employment in my constituency, he is wrong. By business men have to pay their rates, to pay for something of which they are not seeing the benefit, and which makes it difficult for them to stay in business and continue. It is no good the hon. Member for West Derby wagging his head, I know my constituency better than he does. He has enough difficulties. We do not aim to put up our money to help him to supply benefits to his constituents. We do it well enough on equalisation, and do not reckon to have to subsidise cheap transport for his constituents.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not believe that there is any benefit to businesses from the benefit of cheap travel?

Sir Ian Percival: There is none to my ratepayers in subsidising the transport of people in Liverpool. That is a fact, whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not. They resent having to do it, and I agree with them. I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friends are taking steps to curb other people giving benefit to their constituents at the expense of my constituents.

Mr. Ridley: Hear, hear.

Sir Ian Percival: I am afraid that I may have to attack my right hon. and hon. Friends soon. I am glad that they agree with me so far.

The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) said that Merseyside does not get any grant. Why does it not? Because it is spending so much money that it goes right outside the limits under which they would get any grant. It ill behoves any Labour Member to complain that we, and my constituents are part of the we, are not getting any grant. It is their spending that is depriving my constituents of the opportunity to receive the benefit of any grant and producing the situation in which my constituents are having to ante-up about another £5 million to keep low the fares of their constituents at our expense. That is crazy, and it is no good Labour Members saying that we should do it. There is no basis on which they can say that my constituents should pay for their constituens. If it were their constituents doing it for my constituents, they would be hollering even louder than I am.

Mr. Allen McKay: That is the type of people they are. They are happy to help.

Sir Ian Percival: It is so cheap and easy for the hon. Gentleman to say that when he is talking about the recipients. A great many of my constituents are no better off than his, and they deeply resent having to put their hands in their pockets for people who are at least as well off as they are and to provide benefits for which they do not ask themselves. My constituents do not ask for free transport.

Mr. McKay: They like concessionary travel, though.

Sir Ian Percival: The hon. Gentleman does not like it. I am rather glad, because that may mean that I am touching a few sore points.

My constituents understand what my right hon. and hon. Friends are doing, limiting the waste of money in which Labour-controlled authorities seem to exult. We do not understand, however, why we should be penalised at the same time. I hope that my hon. Friend, in winding up will assist me. If those who have wasted money had not wasted it, my constituents would be £5 million better off in the rates than they will be. If those over whom they have no control were not wasting money, we would get a grant of £25 million. Why can we not have that £25 million although they are wasting it. It is no good the hon. Member for West Derby laughing. This is no laughing matter. In no way will Opposition Members' cackling or giggling distract us. Irrespective of whether the hon. Member likes it, the money is going on my constituents' rates and I care about that.

Mr. Wareing: So do I.

Sir Ian Percival: Because of the wastefulness of the Labour party on Merseyside, my constituents will lose the benefit of the grant that they would have received if those over whom they have no control had exercised more control over spending. We do not ask for anything extra, but for my right hon. and hon. Friends to re-examine the matter and let us have the benefit to protect us from the excesses of the people to whom I have referred.

In saying that, I do not detract in any way from the main thrust of my attack, which is on those who seem to spend money as if it does not matter. The fact that such spending appeals to their constituents should not blind them to the fact that, to please their constituents, they are taking money from my constituents, who cannot afford it any more than theirs. There is no moral justification whatever for that.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has finished his speech and sat down.

1.2 am

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I have an interest in this debate, because I use public transport regularly. The people who use it with me are usually the very young, the very old and mothers with young children. In other words, they are people who do not have cars and cannot get about without public transport. If services are cut, the people who can least afford them will be affected.

In my area, anyone who does not have a car must take at least three buses to get to any hospital. The *Middleton Guardian* does not normally support the views of my end of the political spectrum, but on 3 January it ran a headline,

"£10m Cut in Bus Budget"

and the article said:

"Reports that a massive £10M is to be cut from this year's Greater Manchester Transport bus services budget has confirmed the fears of Middleton GMC councillors. It is claimed that the £10M cut will cripple bus services, raise fares, and could lose jobs."

If that was not sufficient to alarm people, we need only to look at a regional paper a month later, the *Manchester Evening News*—again no supporter of our political views. The headline is, "Bus shocker", and it says, "2,000 jobs to go" and then:

"Services cut and three depots are to be axed".

For the poorer section of the community, that is a horrific cut in services.

I could go on at length giving instances. When I was coming into the Chamber, I heard a member of the shadow Front Bench talking about having been ill in hospital for quite a long period. He said that his wife, who is not a car driver, found that she could not get to the hospital by public transport to visit him most nights, because it was too difficult to do so. He said that, by the time she had paid her fares, she had almost bought the taxi. Pensioners who from time to time need to go to hospital do not have that sort of money.

On the question of the proposed cuts, I wish to refer, not to the problems of the elderly, but to the mathematics of the cuts. These figures will spell out to the House and to the people of the various transport authorities exactly what the effect will be. In the Greater Manchester area, the maximum precept which the Secretary of State for Transport has proposed is 19·99p for the Greater Manchester transport authority. Together with grants, this

gives the authority a total expenditure level of £83·5 million for 1986-87. All things considered, this sum is totally inadequate for Greater Manchester's transport needs.

The year 1986-87 is an unusual one, to say the least, because after seven months bus deregulation will be introduced and the financing of public transport will be completely changed. The expenditure this year has to cover seven months of the existing system and five months of the new system. On the latest figures available, the situation is as follows. The period to 26 October will require a grant of about £38 million. Even within this total it will be necessary to increase fares by 10 to 15 per cent. We all know what that will mean to the poorer section of the community—the old-age pensioners, the young and those with young children. This leaves, out of a total of £83·5 million, a sum of £45·5 million, £6 million of which is earmarked by the Secretary of State for redundancy payments — for the 2,000 who are supposed to be clamouring to take redundancy payments, to which I shall come later—and for the losses involved in disposing of other surplus assets as a direct result of deregulation.

The sum of £6 million is totally inadequate. The passenger transport executive has just announced that about 2,000 jobs may have to go in four workshops, with all their engineering skills, and three bus garages. That will mean poorer services. The executive estimates that £25 million, not £6 million, will be needed. The men who are clamouring for redundancy should realise that only £6 million is available for redundancy payments. Spread over 2,000 men, that is £3,000 per man. Even with natural wastage, when the men realise how little they will get, they may have second thoughts. The rest of the money will have to be borrowed, leading to further debt charges. Therefore, only £39·5 million will be available for other expenditure.

The first call on the £39·5 million will be the debt charge which the passenger transport authority will take over from its predecessor and which it cannot avoid. That is estimated at £7·3 million. So, out of a total of £83·5 million £51·3 million is already spoken for, leaving £32·2 million for the PTA to spend on fulfilling its duties after deregulation. None of the expenditure can be reduced in the short term. Most of it involves long-term obligations.

The list omits one important item of expenditure—the provision of socially necessary bus services over and above those provided by the free market. Only £4·7 million is available, but nobody knows at the moment how much will be needed to finance those services. The PTE, which runs 98 per cent. of the buses in Greater Manchester, is likely to run only 60 per cent. of its bus mileage commercially. Therefore, 40 per cent. of the services, or four buses in 10, will not be running after October unless they are financed by support payments. The people of Greater Manchester should realise that.

The services at risk will be those going to works, schools, rural and outer suburban areas, as well as many early morning, evening and Sunday services. They are the least remunerative services, costing over £40 million per year. The top estimate of their revenue is £15 million, so they lose £25 million per year. Even if deregulation reduces costs by 30 per cent., as the Minister claims, the loss will still be £13 million.

Mr. David Mitchell *rose*——

Mr. Callaghan: The precept order allows £4·7 million for providing the services. That is totally inadequate for the needs of the community in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Mitchell: Before the hon. Gentleman sits down——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has sat down.

1.12 am

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): I should like to set the record straight on what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport said in his speech to the Bus and Coach Council this evening. I listen often with interest and usually with admiration to what the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) says, but what he said about my right hon. Friend's speech did not represent fairly what my right hon. Friend was trying to say.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): They were precisely the words used.

Mr. Parris: They were precisely the words used, but if I said to the hon. Gentleman, "Do you like this?" and he replied. "Yes, and no," I might say that the hon. Gentleman had said, "Yes," but unless I mentioned that he had also said, "and no," I would be misinterpreting him.

It is important to put on record what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said. He said that what the bus industry was best at doing was running buses and what local authorities were best at doing was deciding on the level, the direction and the distribution of social provision, and that the purpose of the legislation was to separate those two so that busmen could cease trying to be amateur social workers and get on with the business of running buses, and the local authorities could do what they were elected to do, and decide where benefit should be directed. That seemed to me a fair point for my right hon. Friend to make in the circumstances.

My second point relates to the south Yorkshire PTA. South Yorkshire runs into my constituency. I set aside the rights or wrongs of the measures the House is considering and assume, although we should not, that the House will approve those measures. I accept that the south Yorkshire PTA deeply and genuinely objects to the extent to which its expenditure will be cut and I accept that it has the strongest and most sincere reservations about the fact that fares will have to be increased, but the fact is that fares will have to be increased and the amount of subsidy it will be able to channel to the bus service will have to be reduced. I think that everybody accepts that, but there is a perfectly fair argument as to whether it is right.

That being so, south Yorkshire has to decide whether to get its customers used to higher fares by a gradual and incremental increase in the level of fares or whether to leave fares at their current very low level and suddenly, at the last moment, to allow a huge increase in fares. All the professional busmen, many of them ideologically in sympathy with the PTA, say that a series of incremental increases starting now is the fair and sensible way to treat the customers of the south Yorkshire PTA. On behalf of those customers I make this plea to the passenger transport authority—that, whatever the political advantage of a huge and sudden increase in fares in south Yorkshire, the

[Mr. Parris]

interest of the bus company and the passengers must lie in their being able gradually to get used to the increases, which will, I think, be a fact.

1.16 am

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I believe that for the people of Merseyside the order is aimed at reducing the standard of living in an area which is already grossly deprived. The Merseyside passenger transport authority has had its expenditure redetermined at the level of £81·3 million. That is £20 million less than that required to maintain the service at its current level. I ask the House to bear in mind the fact that not only is the £81·3 million a very low figure but that it also has within it £5 million which, under Government diktat has to be put to one side, for the redundancies which will inevitably follow the implementation of the policy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) has said, Merseyside is also responsible for the airport. We are talking about a joint board, not the Merseyside county council — the alleged overspender that the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) bleeped about. We are talking about a joint board which is now to be penalised at its outset and rate-capped for three years. No account has been taken of the social and economic needs of Merseyside, including the ratepayers that the right hon. and learned Member for Southport talked about. Twenty-one per cent. of his ratepayers do not have jobs but of those that do, half work in Liverpool and depend upon a rail service subsidised by the Merseyside county council. He can explain to his constituents when those services are either reduced or closed down. He has some explaining to do before he finally leaves his seat at the next general election.

On Merseyside we have 21 per cent. unemployment — 25 per cent. in Liverpool. Fifty per cent. of households do not go out every morning and get into a chauffeur-driven car, as Ministers do. They do not have a car at all. That is what we are talking about. In Liverpool that figure is as high as 62 per cent. Forget all the fancy notions. In my opinion and the opinion of my constituents, the people on the Front Bench are beneath contempt.

Ministers are not used to using public transport and they do not know what it is to have to depend on it. Many of those who live in the outer suburbs of Liverpool are 10 or 15 miles from the city centre and heavily dependent on bus services. About 16 per cent. of Merseysiders live on overspill estates, and they often endure appalling housing conditions. Concessionary fares allow pensioners to free themselves—the Conservative party talks so often about freedom—from the areas in which they live as a result of policies that have been introduced by Labour-controlled county councils.

Are Ministers aware that 75 per cent. of those who enter Liverpool city-centre shops have travelled to the area by bus, or rail and bus, including those who come from Southport? Do they realise that 66 per cent. of work journeys into the Liverpool city centre are by passenger transport, by rail as well as bus? Do they know that 25 per cent. of adults on Merseyside are dependent on social benefits, and therefore on a reasonable bus service provided at a reasonable price?

Since 1981, the people of Merseyside have enjoyed a fares policy which has met the real needs of the area. Fares have been reduced twice and we are proud of the fact. Services have been improved, and we make no apology for that. The years of decline have been reversed. Since 1981, passenger usage of buses on Merseyside has increased by 27 per cent. Where has that happened in Tory-controlled areas? Those who use the bus service include people from Southport, Crosby, Wallasey, Wirral, West and Wirral, South. I challenge the Members who represent those constituencies to explain to their constituents why bus fares increase while both bus and train services are lost to them.

The pensioners in these areas, including those from Southport, which has been salvaged by the policy of the Labour-controlled county council, have free passes for bus and train travel. In 1985-86, this cost the Merseyside county council and the districts £18·5 million. The GRE set for transport for 1985-86 was £8·9 million, which was below the figure necessary to provide free transport for pensioners throughout Merseyside. The expenditure of £18·5 million related to the travel that now takes place, and much more money will be needed to provide concessionary fares throughout Merseyside. It seems that higher fares will have to be introduced, and it is estimated by the Merseyside passenger transport executive that fares will rise on Merseyside by about 70 per cent. That increase will take place in an area of utter deprivation. In other words, a 15p fare will be increased to about 21p. The authority estimates that in three years a 15p fare will become 52p.

Conservative Members talk about voluntary redundancies. About 4,300 jobs are at risk in the MPTE as a result of the Government's policy. The Government talk about defending the ratepayer—I should like to know how that talk is reconciled with no block grant being made available to Merseyside. How is that reconciled with the fact that the precepts for police, fire and public transport services—the three joint boards—come to 76·92p? That cost will be borne entirely by Merseyside ratepayers, and that must be compared with the 73p that Merseyside county council levies to cater for the three vital services and for all the other services that it has to provide.

Merseysiders will be exploited. I ask the Minister to compare what is happening in Tyne and Wear with what happens on Merseyside. There is tremendous unemployment in those areas. Tyne and Wear's transport allocation, according to the grant-related expenditure assessment, is £53 million. It is £45 million for Merseyside. Tyne an Wear is to be provided with a block grant of £33 million but Merseyside is to receive none.

Where is the fairness in that, even from this Tory Government? They are below contempt. I expect nothing from them. All I expect is that after the next general election Liverpool will be almost dominated by Labour Members of Parliament and that some of the outlying districts will be devoid of the Tory representatives who diminish this House. If the constituents of the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) who voted for him at the last general election could have heard his speech tonight, it would have been the very last time that they voted for him.

Sir Ian Percival: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wareing: No. I have said all that I want to say.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Caborn.

Sir Ian Percival *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman did not give way.

Sir Ian Percival: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) has referred over and over again to my constituency. Is it not the convention that he should give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It may be the convention, but it is not a point of order. Mr. Caborn.

1.27 am

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I do not intend to rehearse yet again all the transport arguments that were forcefully put to the Committee by the Opposition. It is obvious that they did not make any impression upon the Minister. South Yorkshire passenger transport executive is carrying by far the greatest number of passengers and it is increasing every year. This order will pull the guts out of south Yorkshire's social, cultural and industrial life.

Conservative Members have referred to the rates paid by industrialists. The increase in wages that will be needed to take account of a 225 per cent. increase in fares has to be found somewhere. Industrialists in south Yorkshire are extremely concerned about the fact that pressure will be applied through the collective bargaining procedure.

In addition, the south Yorkshire passenger transport executive will lose 1,600 jobs. There will also be a 10 per cent. reduction in services. That will be the effect on south Yorkshire, a community that has enjoyed an integrated transport system for the last 10 or 12 years.

The way in which the south Yorkshire passenger transport executive has been treated by the Department of Transport is nothing short of diabolical. The Minister said that there have been negotiations with the south Yorkshire passenger transport executive and the new joint boards. The joint boards sent to the Department of Transport a four-page questionnaire. It thought, naively, that there would be serious and real discussions about the problems that will be faced during the transitional period, but no answers were given to those questions. A delegation went to the Department of Transport to see the Secretary of State for Transport and the Minister of State. It deposited with the Department a full list of questions to try to find out what projections will have to be made if there is to be a smooth transition.

Four financial options were included in the three-year plan for 1986-89 which was sent to the Department of Transport on 26 July 1985. The south Yorkshire passenger transport executive referred to a

"presentation containing detailed costings and service level reductions involved in bringing about a phased reduction to the Protected Expenditure Levels proposed by the Secretary of State . . . Both in correspondence and in response to questions to the delegation from South Yorkshire Joint Board and the PTE the Secretary of State has refused to state whether any figures supplied by the PTE or assumptions made by them for calculating the cost and implementing the 1985 Act are wrong or what different assumptions he is using and why."

The Department of Transport, the Secretary of State and the Minister of State have not answered any of the questions asked by the joint board or the PTE. That is the response to the order, even before deregulation on 26 October 1986.

The Government have been asking the joint boards and the PTEs to back a treble in the Derby, the Oaks and the St. Leger or to hit the white on to four reds and get a cannon. This measure will affect the lives of thousands of people socially, culturally and industrially. It is deplorable that the joint board and the people of south Yorkshire have been treated with such contempt.

We have been dealing with a Secretary of State who is at the top of the league in terms of being taken to court for being on the wrong side of the law. The manner in which he has treated south Yorkshire is contemptible. Action should be taken on behalf of the south Yorkshire people. The Secretary of State should be taken to court to justify his actions in reducing by one third the revenue needed to fulfil our transport policy. This will have horrendous effects on the people of south Yorkshire.

1.31 am

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Last Thursday, when this week's business was announced, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition rightly accused the Government of trying to steal legislation through the House late at night in the hope that much of it would not be made known to the people. The order is a prime example. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) that it is an absurdity and an obscenity that the democratic process means that important matters of this sort are dealt with at this time of the night.

The terms of the order are extremely unfair to the people of west Yorkshire. The settlement as a whole for west Yorkshire is unfavourable compared with the settlement for the other areas that are the subject of the order. West Yorkshire people get extremely low pay. They are dependent on public transport, especially buses. About 47 per cent. of households in west Yorkshire do not have a car or access to one. In Bradford that figure rises to more than 50 per cent.

Bus passengers are ratepayers—something that seems to have escaped the notice of the Minister of State and many other Conservatives. Many businesses recognise the importance of public transport and are willing to see expenditure on rates to maintain an effective, efficient bus transport system. In many urban areas of west Yorkshire —the same is true of many other regions—about two thirds of all the people who come to city centres for work, business and other reasons come by bus. On Saturdays, the figure is about 40 per cent. I would argue that most businesses, rather than resenting the amount of money that they pay in rates to maintain an effective public transport system, would say that they face a much bigger burden in the form of high interest rate and exchange rate payments and the cost of energy — matters that are the Government's direct responsibility.

Unless funds are made available for west Yorkshire, there will be a substantial loss in services. The authority estimate something of the order of 18 per cent. That means that many people will face a complete loss of services in rural areas. They will see cuts in Sunday bus services, in early morning and evening services, and also in late night services.

In Bradford we are anticipating an experiment where there will be last buses as late as 2 am. That sort of initiative will be in jeopardy if this Order stands and if more funds are not made available to the transport authority in West Yorkshire.

I draw particular attention to the transitional arrangements. We estimate in west Yorkshire that the transitional costs are going to be about £8·5 million—

[Mr. Max Madden]

much higher than the forecast. Only about £3 million was allowed by the Secretary of State. Job losses are estimated to be between 450 and 800.

Certainly, the redundancy payments are expected to be about £7 million. I would emphasise to the Government, who are so glib in saying that it really does not matter because all these jobs will be accounted for through natural wastage, and there will be voluntary redundancies, that these are job losses. These are the real jobs that the leader of the Conservative Party used to talk so much about. These are the real jobs that are going to be lost in areas of high unemployment. In west Yorkshire about 15 of every hundred people are unemployed, and we can ill afford to lose 800 real jobs in our bus industry.

Public transport, especially bus public transport, is an essential service. In west Yorkshire it is a vital service, and tonight we see a further attempt by this Government to sabotage that service. I am sure that the people that are going to suffer that sabotage when the buses that they used to catch are no longer available, will remember, despite the late hour, who is responsible.

1.37 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The voices that have been raised on this side of the House in large measure represent the strength of feeling that people have about a service, decisions for which should not be taken by this House at all. The decisions about the level and cost of bus and train services should be taken in the places that are affected by the order.

The Minister has made it clear that he believes that his prime duty is not to the service, but to reducing the cost to certain ratepayers. They have a way of judging whether or not the rates they pay are appropriate.

The Government deny that. They pretend that there is not a link between rates and local elections, but the Minister knows that that is not entirely the case. He also knows that to say that the reduced transport cost that is met by ratepayers, and which contributes to local services, such as public transport, protects jobs in inner city and metropolitan areas, is contradictory, when the direct effect of the order—for the first time rate capping of public transport in the four metropolitan areas in question—is immediately felt in job losses.

The Minister held in his hand a bit of paper which showed that 2,000 people in Greater Manchester had accepted redundancy. If that is right, it shows that there are 2,000 fewer jobs. There is no evidence that people are going to find replacement jobs in the foreseeable future, let alone in the transport industries and the public service sectors.

We knew when abolition was proposed for county councils that there would be thousands of job losses. Nothing that the Government have yet done has restored anything like a small percentage of those jobs to people. For every person who loses a job, there may be a family, elderly relatives or dependants who need an income coming in, and a redundancy is not an equality in terms of the balance between that and the opportunity of continued employment.

With a good transport system, one has many advantages. My party does not run South Yorkshire, but the advantages to cities, such as Sheffield, of a late night public transport service at a cheap rate are great, especially to its commerce and business. People can come and spend their money. That is good both socially and for the health and prosperity of the city. In South Yorkshire it is probable that fares will increase by 225 per cent. The Minister knows that, even starting at a low level, a 225 per cent. fare increase is a substantial addition to a weekly bill which many people can ill afford. I am thinking particularly of a mum who makes four journeys a day taking her child to and from school.

Mr. David Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why fares in his constituency, which are substantially higher than the fares in South Yorkshire will be with a 225 per cent. increase, are fair to his constituents but not to constituents in South Yorkshire?

Mr. Hughes: The Minister will remember that I have criticised the policy of London Regional Transport, because since it has taken over bus services have decreased and fares have increased. I am not making a party political point, because, as the Minister knows, the fares fair policy was not introduced by my party. It was of substantial benefit to people on low incomes without mobility. In South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and in my constituency the majority of people do not have their own transport. They cannot leap into a car which is sitting on the drive, because there is no car. By removing a subsidised public transport service to benefit the constituents, for example, of the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival), the Government are saying, "To those who have will be given the facility of services, but those who cannot afford private transport must just rot and stay at home."

Sir Ian Percival: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall not give way. The right hon. and learned Gentleman made the same point over and over again, and we understood it. He said that he did not want social justice to require those who have to pay for those who have not. I reject and resent that. The same test that applies elsewhere should also apply to public transport.

Sir Ian Percival: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I said nothing of the kind. When personal attacks are made——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hughes: As a result of the orders instead of people in the areas in question deciding and offering the electorate a judgment on public transport, the Minister will take that decision. Those who will lose jobs and services will remember the Minister's speech and his attempt to separate commerce from social provision and social duty. Public transport is a public service, and should remain so. The Government should be aware that to privatise it is a gross disadvantage to those less able to help themselves. The Government have failed in their duty.

1.43 am

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My hon. Friends have dealt with the technical points, so I shall turn my attention to south Yorkshire. When we canvass at local elections, general elections and county council elections, we ask ratepayers what they think of the south Yorkshire transport policies. By and large, people agree with them. Some disagree and say that an extra penny or two on fares would help to ease the problem. We

have consistently asked constituents about the cheap bus fares policies, and for 10 years they have returned Labour councillors to the county council.

The Government are trying to recoup the money that has been amassed gradually for 10 years to keep the cheap bus fares policy going. They want to withdraw that money in one go. The withdrawal symptoms will be serious. For 10 years, local authorities have built their facilities around that cheap bus fares policy. Sports centres have been built because people can get to them. Small shops in the rural areas have closed. People travel into the towns because it is cheaper to shop there. What will happen to those facilities when the bus fares increase by 225 per cent.? The sports centres will not pay. There are no shops in the rural areas. Rural areas have run down as a result of Government policies. They are closing post offices in rural areas.

In the Wages Bill, the Government are trying to ensure that people do not have a weekly wage but are paid by cheque which will be cashed at a bank. They need transport to reach a bank from the rural areas. The transport will not be there because the deregulation and the grants will ruin the service.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) said that the fares should be increased gradually. There is not time for them to go up gradually. The people should have been taken into consideration. The Government have not considered the people who use public transport. What about the industries that have a transport policy?

Mr. Robert Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I draw your attention to Standing Order No. 3, which deals with exempted business? It makes plain that, with regard to statutory instruments,

"Mr. Speaker shall put any questions necessary to dispose of such proceedings not later than half-past eleven o'clock or one and a half hours after the commencement of those proceedings, whichever is the later: Provided that, if Mr. Speaker shall be of opinion that, because of the importance of the subject matter of the motion, the time for debate has not been adequate, he shall, instead of putting the question as aforesaid, interrupt the business, and the debate shall stand adjourned till the next sitting".

I submit that we have not had adequate time to deal with an order that covers four metropolitan counties. We have not had an opportunity to hear the Minister's reply——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With great respect, the hon. Member is reminding me of a Standing Order that I consider every day. It is left to the Chair's discretion as to when the hour and a half is up and whether there has been enough time.

Mr. Hughes: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you say, you look at this Standing Order every day. I am making a submission to you that these circumstances require special consideration. I ask you to rule accordingly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair takes everything into consideration. The decision will be given when we have had an hour and a half. Mr. Allen McKay.

Mr. McKay: I was talking about industry. Conservative Members have talked about the cheap fares policy and said that industry does not like it. We visited industry and I have received no grumbles from industry. No one likes paying taxes and rates. I am sure all hon. Members will agree that they have come across that feeling.

There is industry in Yorkshire which has its own fares policy. The National Coal Board has a cheap bus fares policy, which costs it thousands of pounds each year. It is based on the cost of bus fares. If fares increase by 225 per cent., its contribution will increase by 225 per cent. That will be a levy on the National Coal Board. It will not be the only industry to suffer because some major contractors also have——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted Business).*

The House divided: Ayes 151, Noes 101.

Division No. 70] **[1.50 am**

AYES

Alexander, Richard	Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Amess, David	Lawler, Geoffrey
Ancram, Michael	Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Arnold, Tom	Lightbown, David
Ashby, David	Lilley, Peter
Aspinwall, Jack	Lord, Michael
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*	Lyell, Nicholas
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Baldry, Tony	Maclean, David John
Bellingham, Henry	Major, John
Bendall, Vivian	Malins, Humfrey
Benyon, William	Malone, Gerald
Best, Keith	Maples, John
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Marlow, Antony
Biggs-Davison, Sir John	Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Blackburn, John	Mather, Carol
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Maude, Hon Francis
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Merchant, Piers
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Meyer, Sir Anthony
Bright, Graham	Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Brinton, Tim	Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Brooke, Hon Peter	Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Bruinvels, Peter	Moate, Roger
Buck, Sir Antony	Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Budgen, Nick	Murphy, Christopher
Burt, Alistair	Neale, Gerrard
Butterfill, John	Nelson, Anthony
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*	Neubert, Michael
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Nicholls, Patrick
Chope, Christopher	Norris, Steven
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*	Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Coombs, Simon	Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Cope, John	Parris, Matthew
Couchman, James	Pawsey, James
Cranborne, Viscount	Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Currie, Mrs Edwina	Pollock, Alexander
Dickens, Geoffrey	Portillo, Michael
Dorrell, Stephen	Powell, William *(Corby)*
Dover, Den	Powley, John
Durant, Tony	Raffan, Keith
Dykes, Hugh	Rhodes James, Robert
Eggar, Tim	Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Emery, Sir Peter	Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Fallon, Michael	Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Favell, Anthony	Roe, Mrs Marion
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*	Rost, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan	Ryder, Richard
Greenway, Harry	Sackville, Hon Thomas
Gregory, Conal	Sayeed, Jonathan
Griffiths, Sir Eldon	Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Ground, Patrick	Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*	Sims, Roger
Hampson, Dr Keith	Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Hanley, Jeremy	Speed, Keith
Harvey, Robert	Spencer, Derek
Heddle, John	Stanley, Rt Hon John
Henderson, Barry	Stern, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*	Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter	Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*

Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Peter Lloyd.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
George, Bruce
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Michie, William
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Rowlands, Ted
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Precept Limitation (Passenger Transport Authorities) (Prescribed Maximum) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.

Centre for Single Homeless, Irvine

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

1.59 am

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): The Cochrane street centre for single homeless project was mooted more than three years ago by Cunninghame district council because of the increasing problem of single homeless with social, psychological, psychiatric and financial problems presenting themselves to the housing department. Some of those people had, at one time, been tenants of the council but for various reasons had to give up their tenancies. They were known to have personal problems which could not be solved by merely rehousing them. Indeed, if we did that, we were aware that their immediate neighbours would come at once to the housing department and demand to be transferred to other areas or have the unfortunate single person evicted for anti-social behaviour.

We did not have general needs housing in the district which would meet the needs of those prospective tenants. Cunninghame district council was trying to diversify its housing to meet the needs of all categories of people who require housing in this project. The unit at Cochrane street was to be used by the Salvation Army and Cunninghame district council to provide not only shelter, but support, comfort and guidance. The tenants were to have training, work experience and, we hope, motivation to integrate back into society. As part of the treatment plan, Cunninghame district council would provide the workshops to refurbish furniture and electrical goods where the tenants would be supervised by trained staff. They would receive payment for their work, and the workshops would be adjacent to the unit. Cunninghame district council would also set aside general needs housing in all areas to rehouse the tenants when they were ready to move on. This would ensure that the unit would not become blocked or used as permanent housing.

All appropriate agencies were consulted, and they promised to support the project. They included the local social work department of Strathclyde regional council, the DHSS and the Scottish Council for Single Homeless. The project would also complement the supported lodgings scheme sponsored by Strathclyde regional council and financed by urban aid. After those consultations, the council's director of technical services was instructed to design a purpose-built centre within urban aid capital cost limits to provide accommodation for single homeless people to meet the private needs of the residents and the need to provide adequate control and supervision of the centre.

The district council submitted the project to the Scottish Development Department's urban renewal unit for urban programme grant, with much expectation. However, in a letter dated 23 April 1985, the urban renewal unit advised the council that its application for urban aid grant for the centre had been rejected. The decision was accompanied by a comment that the capital cost of the project was extremely high, and the suggestion that Cunninghame district council reconsider the scale and design of the project in consultation with the Scottish Council for Single Homeless.

Since receipt of that letter, Cunninghame district council has consulted the Scottish Council for Single

Homeless and the Salvation Army, which have agreed to manage the centre. As a result of the consultations, a revised design was prepared. The original proposals provided accommodation for 32 persons, including five self-contained flats with central kitchen and dining facilities, and day-care facilities. To reduce the costs, a revised plan was prepared as the basis for consultations, which included ½ two storey accommodation for 20 single persons in four clusters of five bed-sits. Each cluster has a common bathroom, and lounge/kitchen/dining area. Each individual bedsit incorporated a WC and wash hand basin. The central kitchen/dining and day care facilities were deleted from the original plan.

Following consultations with the Salvation Army, the plans were altered to provide showers within each bedsit, thereby allowing the communal bathrooms for the two upper floor clusters and one ground floor cluster to be deleted and replaced in each case with storage accommodation. On the advice of the Salvation Army, however, a disabled shower and toilet has been provided on the ground floor for use as required. A covered direct link has also been designated between the warden's house and the centre to allow the warden speedy access to the centre if necessary without requiring to enter through the main entrance.

The main point made by the Scottish Council for Single Homeless was that the centre should also cater for persons requiring more privacy while resident in the centre and, where necessary, to prepare residents for the more independent lifestyle that they would require to adopt on leaving the centre. The design of one of the ground floor bedsit clusters has therefore been amended by deleting the communal lounge/kitchen/dining area and increasing the size of each bedsit to include kitchen facilities. The SCSH also pointed out that the location of the laundry next to the communal/visitors lounge could cause disturbance and the plans have therefore been altered by placing the visitors toilet between the laundry and the lounge.

The revised design had implications for estimated operating costs of the centre and a fresh budget was prepared. Staff salaries were based on Salvation Army gradings for similar posts elsewhere. The staff to client ratio is high, but this is necessary to provide the intensive supervision care and counselling which it is envisaged that the centre will provide. Income will be derived entirely from rental payments. The income figure included in the draft budget is based on a rent of £40 per person per week but this may require to be altered according to circumstances, including current DHSS regulations.

The Minister can imagine the councils's astonishment when it received a letter dated 13 January 1986, from the urban renewal unit, saying that the revised application for urban programme grant for the Cochrane street project had been turned down. The letter said:

"At a capital cost of £405,000, which may be a conservative estimate, and also in running costs the project is still very expensive. After full consideration we feel that there are not sufficient grounds, in terms of Urban programme priorities . . . or in terms of an exceptional scale or nature of benefits, to justify approval. I am afraid that we are therefore unable to offer Urban Programme support."

When I met the Minister on 24 January, in the Scottish Office in London, asked him to overturn the decision, and put the council's case to him to grant the application, he refused, and he accepted the reasoning of the urban renewal unit.

This project is unique in Scotland. It is more than a hostel, but it is not an institution. Admission would be voluntary, and the tenant would have to agree to the programme. An advisory group would be set up to monitor the running of the unit. The model for this project is run by the Salvation Army in Vancouver, Canada, and two of the councillors have visited it. Councillor Teresa Beattie, and Councillor George Steven, who works for the Salvation Army and is convenor of the planning committee, took the opportunity to go there when on a visit to Canada. The project leader in Vancouver, Major Campbell, will visit Scotland later this year and he has agreed to advise the council on setting up the hostel.

The running costs will be high initially, but they were projected into 1987-88. They are not prohibitive for this type of venture, which is unique in Scotland. Revenue will be available from the Department of Health and Social Security, from the workshops and from local funding by the Salvation Army through fêtes, bazaars and the rest. The Salvation Army has practical experience of providing care for this type of person. It is renowned for maintaining this type of establishment economically and for providing this type of care and support.

From our discussions—I have been involved in all of them—with the Salvation Army, it is clear that it is committed to the project. It regards it as a pilot scheme in the United Kingdom and as a new initiative. We hope that the project would be self-financing within four years. CDC and the Salvation Army have complied with the original demands of the Scottish Office in reducing the cost to under £500,000 and have also taken the advice of the agencies recommended by the Scottish Office. Mrs. Beattie, the convenor of the council, says in a letter:

"We would be demoralised if this project was turned down as we have spent so much time and effort following the demands and advice given by the Scottish Office."

I submit that the project satisfies the urban programme priorities in terms of exceptional scale and the nature of the benefits. It therefore justifies approval. I am asking the Minister to review the decision given to me on 13 January and to grant approval or, if he cannot do that, at least to agree to meet a deputation of councillors and representatives of the Salvation Army and others involved in the project to give us an opportunity to have a full discussion to see whether the project could be included in plans for the future.

2.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) has, as I would expect, given us a clear expression of his support for the project for the centre for the single homeless in Cochrane street, Irvine, which would provide facilities for 20 homeless residents. He has made it clear that he believes that it would meet a real need in the area. I recognise the hon. Gentleman's strength of feeling that this project deserves to go ahead if at all possible.

I hope that the hon. Member will accept that it was with regret, and only after the most careful and extended consideration, that my Department concluded that the urban programme assistance sought for this project could not be approved.

To explain why we had to refuse this application, I need to go back to November 1984, when my right hon. Friend, the previous Secretary of State for Scotland, issued a

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

restatement of the criteria and priorities within which the urban programme would in future operate. These revised eligibility criteria and priorities are designed to improve the effectiveness, and the cost-effectiveness, of the urban programme in tackling multiple deprivation in urban areas. To that end, we tightened up the definition of areas eligible for urban aid. We stressed the need for projects to be new and innovative and we made it clear that priority would be given to those projects which would make the best contribution to tackling deprivation.

We also insisted that projects should be cost-effective and, in particular, laid down that projects with a capital cost of over £500,000 would in no circumstances be considered, and those costing over £300,000 would require to offer benefits of a quite exceptional scale or nature to be accepted for support. I am sure that the hon. Member will not quarrel with the intention behind these revised criteria and priorities, which is to ensure that the available resources are used to the best possible effect.

In practice, this means that since 1984 any unusually expensive capital project has to demonstrate quite exceptional merit in terms of its contribution to a comprehensive deprivation strategy for the area, its degree of innovation, its involvement of voluntary or community effort and its value for money.

So how did the proposed centre for the single homeless score on these factors? The short answer is, not too badly, but not nearly well enough.

In the first place, the proposed catchment area for the project is not exceptionally high-priority. While a few parts of the catchment area rank among the relatively most deprived areas, most are not within the worst 5 per cent. in Scotland. As a whole, therefore, the catchment area defined for this project is not amongst the very worst in Scotland.

In the second place, although this project developed out of the district council's concern with local single homelessness as a significant problem in the area, and although the project brings together rehabilitative elements as well as physical housing provision, it cannot really be said to be integral to a comprehensive or co-ordinated strategy for tackling deprivation in the area. Other essential policies and projects do not hinge on it.

What we had in mind in saying in 1984 that priority would be given to projects which are key elements in a properly documented comprehensive strategy to tackle the problems of an area was to encourage authorities to develop programmes of projects to tackle a range of local problems in a systematic fashion over a number of years. No evidence has been submitted to the Scottish Development Department to suggest that this project is integral to a programme of this kind: on the contrary, the various projects submitted by Cunninghame district council over recent years, however worthwhile individually, seem to have little in common, and usually not to be linked in any way.

Thirdly, it has to be said that the project is not particularly innovative. This type of provision has been tried out already in other parts of Scotland. It is therefore not possible to say that this project would have an experimental value. We already have considerable evidence that this type of provision makes a good deal of sense. Indeed, there should by now be enough evidence to convince local authorities that provision of this sort should be met from their mainstream resources, where necessary.

Fourthly, the number of people to benefit directly from the project, as I think the hon. Member appreciates, would be small. At any one time, only 20 individuals could be housed in the unit. In comparison with the total number of deprived households locally—and, more particularly, in comparison with the numbers which might benefit fom other urban programme projects — very few indeed would benefit from this project.

Finally, and most significantly, the costs of the project are extremely high. The original project application, which was turned down last summer, had estimated capital costs of £497,000, perilously close to the limit of £500,000. Estimates being what they are, it seems very likely that actual costs would have exceeded that figure. In turning down the project, as the hon. Member has pointed out, my officials did ask the district council to reconsider the scale and design of accommodation, in further discussion with the Scottish Council for Single Homeless. Our aim was to see whether the costs could be reduced sufficiently to avoid the need for exceptional merit to be demonstrated.

Revised proposals were submitted for a smaller scale centre which was, at £405,000, cheaper than before, but unfortunately still markedly above the £300,000 normal limit. On top of these capital costs, running costs of nearly £100,000 would be required.

My Department's conclusion was that, even after the reworking and reduction in scale, the costs involved remained unacceptably high in relation to the benefits, and were not likely to represent value for money. We concluded therefore that the benefits in terms of impact on the local community as a whole did not justify the costs and therefore that the case for exceptional treatment had not been made out.

I must stress that this refusal does not mean that we think that this project is without value. I am very aware of the problem of single homelessness, and I would wish, wherever possible, to support suitable projects aimed at tackling this problem. But the resources available for the urban programme are limited; and it is simply not acceptable for a single, very expensive project to take up a sizeable slice of those resources unless it can show very exceptional merits indeed in terms of the stated aims of the programme.

When I met the hon. Member to discuss this decision last month, I undertook to consider whether any other sources of central Government support might be available for this project, and to let him know. I regret to have to tell him that I see no prospect of support from other sources. The only other conceivable funding vehicle for such projects from central Government is assistance under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 but again the project is not sufficiently innovative to be eligible. In any event, this is already fully committed for 1986-87. I am afraid therefore that, if Cunninghame district council wishes to provide this new facility, it seems likely that it will have to find the money itself.

I know that this conclusion will come as a disappointment to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South, who has campaigned long and hard on behalf of the project. In terms of the criteria and priorities for the urban programme, however, and in the light of the continuing

intense high quality competition for its resources, I am afraid that projects like this are simply not strong enough to gain approval.

However, I am pleased to inform the hon. Member that Cunninghame district council has today submitted five new projects for urban programme support for 1986-87. Clearly my Department will have to spend some time in appraising the new applications, but at least one of them —I note that it is the one to which the council itself has given the highest priority—seems at first glance to be very attractive indeed in terms of the criteria and priorities of the urban programme. It is a project to upgrade in stages the physical environment of a rundown council housing estate, while at the same time educating and encouraging the local population to care for their environment, and to participate in community self-help. If my Department is able to approve the project, I very much hope that that will be of some consolation to the hon. Member.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

FELIXSTOWE DOCK AND RAILWAY BILL

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the quorum for conducting business in relation to the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill remain as at present.—*[Mr. Willie W. Hamilton.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Japan

1. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the change in the volume, value and types of goods and services exported to Japan in 1985, as compared with the previous five years.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): Information on volume of trade with individual countries is not available. Between 1980 and 1985 the value of United Kingdom visible exports to Japan rose from £597 million to £1,015 million, with textiles and chemicals pre-eminent. The latest available estimate of our invisible surplus with Japan is of £720 million for 1982.

Mr. Chapman: First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on his recent appointment. He will be aware, as the rest of us are, that our current trading deficit with Japan is now running annually at over £3,000 million, and that at least part of that is due to the Japanese failing to observe fair reciprocal trading standards. Does he not think that it is high time the Government consulted other countries in a similar trading position and insisted that the Japanese Government took more imports, and that there was a planned reduction in the imbalance?

Mr. Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kindness. Certainly I share his anxieties, as I believe do right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. I appreciate his remarks about co-ordinating action with other countries. I had informal discussions with Commissioner De Clercq last week on this subject, and I shall be attending the Council of Ministers in Luxembourg next week, at which this subject will be discussed. The Community will be reviewing its policy towards Japan.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my hon. Friend accept my congratulations on his appointment? We know that he is someone who will stand up realistically for British interests in the highest tradition. When he is in Europe, will he tell the Japanese that we are tired of their promises, their hopes and their agreements? Will he explain to them that the nightmare of the Japanese destroying much of Europe's manufacturing base year after year must end, and that if they do not do it we shall do it for them?

Mr. Clark: Regrettably, many of the inroads to which my hon. Friend refers arise from the uncompetitiveness of European industry. Where it arises out of unfair practices, and where resistance to our import penetration into Japan arises from obstructions that are placed in the way of our trade penetration, there is an urgent need for action. The Japanese have introduced an action programme——

Mr. Skinner: Sold out to the Japanese.

Mr. Clark: Wait and see.

Mr. Skinner: Read it out.

Mr. Clark: I have not read anything yet. The action programme, so called, to which my hon. Friend has referred, and which the Japanese claim to be considerable, is the seventh of such promises that they have made. I admit that progress so far is extremely disappointing.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that he is already showing signs of having thrown in the towel on the question of trade with Japan? We hear this afternoon the coded language of the Minister for Bongo-bongo land. Is he aware that I cannot congratulate him upon getting this post, because it is like the Prime Minister putting Herod in charge of Mothercare?

Mr. Clark: I appreciate the special relationship that I always enjoy with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I take it as a compliment that he felt obliged to intervene as early as he did after my appointment, but he was making so much noise that he was incapable of listening to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark). When he reads it in *Hansard*, I hope that he will not be disappointed.

Mr. Holt: May I add my congratulations to those of other hon. Members and say to my hon. Friend that it might assist him in his new task if he held consultations with the Department of Education and Science on the subject of Japanese language teaching. According to a written answer to me, the Government do not know how much Japanese, if any, is being taught in our schools. Only four universities embrace the subject, but the Government do not know how many students are studying Japanese. If, instead of whingeing, we took on the Japanese on their own ground, learnt the language and sent out our entrepreneurs, engineers and technicians to Japan, our balance of trade would be very much better.

Mr. Clark: That is a very sensible suggestion. However, as my hon. Friend rightly says, it is better directed to those who are concerned with education rather than to my Department. One of the reasons for the overwhelming Japanese advance is that practically all Japanese business men can, when they choose to do so, speak perfect English.

Mr. Gould: Were our trading problems with the Japanese not resolved by the much publicised visit of the Minister's right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) to Tokyo a year or so ago? What went wrong? Why did his visit not succeed?

Mr. Clark: I understand that Premier Nakasone has to face a general election in the autumn. It is generally recognised that the imminence of a general election inhibits long-term decision making.

Trades Union Congress

2. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the Trades Union Congress; and what matters will be discussed.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): I have no immediate plans to do so, but of course I am always prepared to have such a meeting.

Mr. Clarke: When the Secretary of State eventually holds such a meeting, will he bear in mind the worries of many people that for every three jobs that we had in the steel industry when this Government took office, we now have only one? Given that rapid decline, how long will it be before we cease to have an indigenous steel industry and no jobs in steel?

Mr. Channon: I know of the hon. Gentleman's concern about the steel industry. He has raised it many times in the House. However, he overlooks the fact that during the past five years over £4·5 billion has been contributed to the steel industry. It is a little unfair to say that the Government have not tried to help it.

Mr. Favell: What would the position now be if our share of the domestic motor car industry market was not 34 per cent., but the 90 per cent. that it was 25 years ago? How many more jobs would now be secure at Ravenscraig and Gartcosh?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend makes the point extremely forcefully. Many of our problems would undoubtedly be very much eased if we had more than a 3·9 per cent. share of the European car market.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the Secretary of State arrange a meeting with the Trades Union Congress to discuss the Government's disastrous plan to sell off Leyland Commercial Vehicles, Land Rover and Freight Rover to General Motors, with a loss of research and development and jobs in both Leyland Commercial Vehicles and General Motors? Why are this Government, who used to talk about batting for Britain, now continually batting for American multinationals?

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman distorts the position. It was made clear to the House on several occasions last week that I am trying very hard to secure a viable future for those parts of British Leyland to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I want to try to ensure that that can be done, and that I shall obtain adequate assurances that will satisfy the House.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Does my right hon. Friend think that it might be possible to persuade members of the TUC that an approach by Leyland Bus to Laird, possibly to take it over, or at least to amalgamate with it, might be more acceptable to the trade unions than the reverse? At the same time, will he consider the possibility of negotiations between Leyland Trucks and a European manufacturer, such as Daf, which may have more in common with Leyland in terms of manufacturing trucks than General Motors has.

Mr. Channon: As my hon. Friend is aware, at present talks are taking place between British Leyland and the Laird group about the future of Leyland Bus. Obviously the board would consider other proposals on their commercial merits in relation to the company as a whole.

Mr. Williams: When the Secretary of State eventually meets the TUC, how will he explain that after six so-called leaner, fitter, Tory years, during which world trade in manufactures has risen by 27 per cent., our manufacturing output has fallen, our manufacturing investment has fallen and is still 20 per cent. below the level when the Government came to office, and our manufacturing imports have soared by 45 per cent.?

Mr. Channon: I must point out that our manufacturing investment rose by 14·5 per cent. in 1984 and by a further 6 per cent. in 1985. Manufacturing exports increased by 8·5 per cent. in 1985, and, in terms of both volume and value, are at a record high.

Lloyd's (Inquiry)

3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance his Department is providing to the inquiry that he has set up into Lloyd's; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: A small secretariat has been established for the committee of inquiry, headed by a principal in my Department. Accommodation is also being provided within the Department. The committee's need for any further assistance will be kept under review.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If 25 Lloyd's agencies fail the honest, competent, solvent and fit and proper test for registration under the Lloyd's Act 1982, would it not place a question mark over the individuals who work in those agencies? Should not those individuals be barred from joining other agencies, and thereby secure registration?

Mr. Channon: It is not right for me to comment on individual cases — [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] — because several cases are the subject of investigations. I hope that the committee will report soon in the summer, and if action is necessary we shall certainly take it.

Mr. Yeo: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that if evidence emerges, either as a result of the inquiry or from other sources, that the present regulatory regime at Lloyd's is unsatisfactory, he will introduce as a matter of urgency legislation to improve that regulatory regime, recognising that the present Financial Services Bill may not be the appropriate vehicle?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is right in saying that the Financial Services Bill is not the appropriate vehicle. He asks a hypothetical question. If the committee were to report in that sense, we should wish to consider its findings as a matter of great urgency, and I should certainly want to establish the most satisfactory regime possible.

Mr. Sedgemore: Will the Secretary of State ensure that the results of his Department's investigation into the Unimar fraud, which spelt doom for Sir Peter Green, a past chairman of Lloyd's, are made available to the inquiry? Will he further ensure that the Bellew Parry and Raven report prepared by Sir Edward Singleton, which is complete, but for some unknown reason has not been published by Lloyd's, will be made available to the inquiry?

Mr. Channon: I shall ensure that the inquiry has all the relevant information.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the Lloyd's Act 1982 had been introduced this year, instead of three years ago, the House would never have accepted the principle of self-regulation? Does he further accept that many Conservative Members and other hon. Members do not accept that self-regulation is appropriate?

Mr. Channon: I am sure my hon. Friend welcomes the fact that we have set up the inquiry, that it will report speedily, and that the House can then consider the appropriate way forward.

Cornwall (Tin Mining)

4. **Mr. Penhaligon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the future of Cornwall's tin mining industry.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Morrison): I cannot comment on the commercial prospects for Cornwall's tin mining industry until the market reopens and we know the price at which tin will settle. Negotiations to reach a settlement of the tin crisis are in progress and the Government are doing everything they can to ensure the best deal possible to enable orderly trading in tin to resume.

Mr. Penhaligon: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Cornish tin industry contributes £23 million a year to Cornwall's economy and £50 million a year to our balance of payments and employs 2,000 people? The Government have responded generously to the problems of those who deal in tin by offering £50 million. May we have an assurance that those who mine that mineral will receive a similar sum?

Mr. Morrison: I am very much aware of the contribution of the tin industry in Cornwall over the years, not least because the hon. Gentleman and my colleagues have made representations to me and brought delegations to see me. As I have said before to the hon. Gentleman, the best action is to sort out the problems so that we know the price at which tin is trading before looking precisely at the problem relating to Cornwall.

Mr. Hicks: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's efforts, but does he agree that the situation has become urgent? It is almost six months since these problems first arose. Will he assure the House that, once the problems of the International Tin Council are resolved, he will give sympathetic consideration to the needs and requirements of the tin industry in Cornwall?

Mr. Morrison: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend about the urgency of the problem. I have been saying that for some time—no doubt, boring him. As soon as the problem is sorted out, we must look at what is necessary and at what can be done for Cornwall.

Mr. Williams: Is there not at least a marginal inconsistency in the hon. Gentleman's line, in that he cannot decide what help he will give the industry to overcome the crisis until the crisis is over?

Mr. Morrison: With respect, I do not think that there is such an inconsistency. As the right hon. Gentleman is very much aware, many other countries are involved. Until we know precisely the price at which tin settles, it would be incorrect to pre-empt any further discussion.

Mr. Harris: I appreciate the difficulty in which my hon. Friend finds himself. Nevertheless, will he recognise that time is fast running out and that, if we wait much longer, at least one mine—Geevor in my constituency—will no longer exist? We cannot afford to wait much longer.

Mr. Morrison: I am more than aware of the need to get on with this matter. The fact that negotiations have taken place between the council and its creditors is a significant step forward.

National Economic Development Council

5. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to attend the National Economic Development Council; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Channon: On 5 March. The agenda for the meeting has not yet been agreed.

Mr. McWilliam: Does the right hon. Gentleman intend discussing the motor industry in general and British Leyland in particular at the meeting?

Mr. Channon: It is not for me to set the agenda. That is a matter for the National Economic Development Organisation.

Mr. Hickmet: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity at the meeting to discuss with the NEDC the predatory pricing policies of the Japanese, and especially the use of regional grants, and so on, by the Department of Trade and Industry to enable factories such as the Tokyo Electric Co. which has been undercutting W and T. Avery in the supply of electronic scales, to capture British markets and put 500 people out of work? Should not that issue be addressed by my right hon. Friend at the meeting?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue which deserves discussion. I think that both sides of the House have warmly welcomed inward investment in general. People are anxious to have increased inward investment, although, clearly, not at the expense of the jobs of others.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: As the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear when he attends the NEDC meeting that he believes it is essential for the economy that we have a growing, thriving and successful manufacturing sector? Is he aware that that sector has experienced a steady decline since the Conservatives came to office? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is a need for major efforts to be made to ensure that the manufacturing sector makes to the economy the contribution that it must?

Mr. Channon: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said a few moments ago. I gave the figures for manufacturing output and manufacturing exports. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. We need a thriving manufacturing sector and a thriving services sector. The hon. Gentleman does not do manufacturing a service when he denigrates what has been achieved in the past few years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the NEDC the fall of some 7 per cent. in the cost of raw materials and fuel in the past year? Should that not lead through to lower prices of manufactured goods and increase our ability to compete?

Mr. Channon: I very much hope that that is the case. My hon. Friend has put his finger on an important point.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the right hon. Gentleman also take the opportunity to discuss what steps can be taken to oppose and restrict the European method of energy subsidisation in industrial products, as the British glass industry has suffered as a result of extremely unfair competition from Europe?

Mr. Channon: That matter has been raised often with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. I shall not set the agenda for the meeting with the NEDC next week, but the House has made some interesting suggestions.

Mr. John Mark Taylor: When my hon. Friend has these meetings, will he canvass the possibility of floating Land Rover on the Birmingham stock exchange and give us a chance?

Mr. Channon: What I certainly think should be done, and what I am determined to work towards, with, I am sure, my hon. Friend, is the best future for Land Rover, for those who work in it and for the company's long-term future.

Mr. John Smith: If the Secretary of State discusses the British motor vehicle industry with the NEDC, will he explain to it and the House why the Government have clearly rejected the option of standing four square behind British Leyland, Leyland Bus and Land Rover to preserve an independent British capability?

Mr. Channon: As usual, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is overstating the case. The House knows very well that the Government have poured £1·2 billion into Leyland over the years, with guarantees of more than £1·8 billion still available. We should now work together for a viable car industry. That is in the general interest.

Mr. Wilson: Has the Secretary of State noticed that, as part of the merger mania, a series of major attacks have been made on Scottish companies such as DCL and Coats Patons? Will he undertake to discuss with the NEDC the development of the Scottish regional economy so that we retain the greatest possible indigenous control of our industry?

Mr. Channon: The regional economy of Scotland is no doubt a suitable subject for the NEDC. I do not believe that individual takeovers are an appropriate subject, however, although I shall no doubt get advice in due course from the Director General of Fair Trading about the companies to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

British Steel Corporation

6. **Mr. Lightbown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the profit or loss made by the British Steel Corporation in 1979-80 and in 1984-85, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): Excluding the costs of the miners' strike, the corporation made a profit in 1984-85, after interest and before exceptional items, of £40 million. The comparable figure for 1979-80 was a loss of £538 million. This is an impressive recovery, and the strategy announced last August points the way to sustained profitability for the BSC.

I am now able to inform the House that the BSC's external financing limit for 1985-86 is being increased from £360 million to £414 million. This will enable the corporation to implement the decisions announced last August.

Mr. Lightbown: I welcome those figures and congratulate the industry on this remarkable turnround. I also congratulate the management on achieving that without confrontation, but with discussion and negotiation. Does my hon. Friend agree that there should be an early return of the industry to the private sector, where it rightly belongs?

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government's objective is to return the BSC to the private sector as soon as circumstances allow, not least involving the liability of the corporation. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments—we have them very much in mind.

Mr. MacKenzie: Is the Minister aware that anybody can reduce the losses of any big company simply by shutting down plant? That is how we see it in Scotland. How many jobs do we now have in the BSC as compared with 1979-80?

Mr. Butcher: I quite understand the right hon. Gentleman's anxiety about jobs. As for the core activity and the maintenance of the five integrated steel making plants, it is in the corporation's interests to note market conditions and reduce the amount of subsidy necessary to keep those plants and the downstream plants in operation.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the decisions taken by the Conservative Government to keep Ravenscraig in production and the results that have been achieved show how wise those decisions were and that all the other decisions taken to close non-productive plants were equally wise, which is why the corporation is now beginning to show profits?

Mr. Butcher: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that my hon. Friend has the Ravenscraig plant much in mind. I hope that he will be encouraged by the three-year projections that have now come forward, as approved by the Commission under the steel regime. The plant's future is more assured and it will benefit, for example, from reallocations of quota, not least the reallocation of quota from Alpha steel.

Mr. Crowther: As the Minister apparently could not answer the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. MacKenzie) about the number of jobs lost, will he take it from me that in the process of returning to profitability the BSC has got rid of 120,000 jobs, few of which have been replaced by other employment in the steel-making areas? Will he guess, if nothing else, how much it costs taxpayers to keep 120,000 people out of work?

Mr. Butcher: Considerations about the steel industry are a function of two parameters. One is the need to reduce taxpayers' exposure to continuing losses, and the other is to continue to supply steel to British industry. Important though the steelworkers' constituency is, there is a much bigger constituency to address — the effect on all engineering industries and steel users of the competitiveness of BSC, its improvement and the prices that it charges its customers.

Mr. Hickmet: Does my hon. Friend agree that the position in 1979 was that the British steel industry was massively overmanned and was producing steel at a cost that exceeded nearly every other competitor? Today, we are producing steel efficiently, effectively and, most important, competitively. The BSC is the lowest-cost producer in Europe. Right hon. and hon. Members must acknowledge that achievement.

Mr. Butcher: I hope the House will celebrate the fact that, as we come to the end of the steel aid regime in Europe, our industry is in the best competitive shape to face true competition. That is a tribute to the BSC's managers and comprehensively vindicates the Government's policy.

Mr. James Hamilton: In view of the closures that are taking place, will the Minister concede that serious consideration should be given to the social consequences and the loss of human dignity? Will he say what the Government intend to do about Ravenscraig, bearing in mind that they have consistently told us that it is a matter for the Government? What do the Government intend to do to give the people of Lanarkshire and Scotland some hope for the future of the steel industry?

Mr. Butcher: One of the more distressing aspects of my job in the Department of Trade and Industry is considering the cases that come through under the ISERBS regime — retraining and the requests for help from various people, which hon. Members bring forward. The Government have maintained an aid regime which helps with training and helps former employees to graft on new skills. That, with the work done by the BSC in closure areas, amounts to living up to the responsibilities that major corporations and Governments have.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

8. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report on the European Economic Community Council of Ministers meeting on 27-28 January to decide the Community's negotiating mandate for renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement.

12. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the most recent negotiations towards a renewed multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: There was a very brief discussion about the multi-fibre arrangement in the Council of Ministers on 27 January. The only decisions taken were to have a substantive discussion at the Council of Ministers meeting on 17-18 February, and to try to agree on a negotiating mandate before the end of February.

Negotiations in the general agreement on tariffs and trade on renewal of the MFA are still at an early stage.

It is too early to say whether we are likely to achieve our objectives as set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 1985.

Mr. Lawler: As my hon. Friend will be aware, President Reagan has undertaken not to weaken the MFA. When my hon. Friend attends the next meeting, will he impress upon fellow European Ministers the danger that this presents of a large diversion of trade from the United States should the EEC adopt a weaker policy?

Mr. Clark: It is true that the President of the United States actually instructed that negotiations should be conducted in an aggressive manner. We are still awaiting the completion of the terms of the mandate which goes to the commissioners. My hon. Friend can be certain that a variety of views will be encompassed in the discussions.

Mr. Waller: Does my hon. Friend accept that some potentially lucrative markets for exporters—one thinks of Taiwan, South Korea and Brazil—are very largely closed because of the policies of their Governments? As those countries are substantial textile and clothing exporters to this country, will my hon. Friend make recipsocity one of his leading objectives in the negotiations that are to take place?

Mr. Clark: All negotiations depend on a calculated trade-off of advantage and concession. My hon. Friend has pointed out one of the principal considerations affecting those countries from which textile imports originate. The level to which reciprocity would be to our advantage has to be a matter of calculation and assessment.

Mr. James Lamond: Has the Minister been receiving the same rather plaintive representations from employers in the textile industry as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have been receiving? Is he prepared to meet their desire to protect the very fragile recovery that there has been in the textile industry?

Mr. Clark: I would not term the representations as plaintive. There have been well argued and carefully considered representations from a wide variety of employers. They will be taken into account, as will the views of right hon. and hon. Gentlemen in the debate that we are to have tomorrow.

Mr. Mason: Is the Minister aware that in my constituency over 2,000 people are employed in the textile and carpet industries? All the shop stewards report to me their serious concern at the liberal attitude taken by the Secretary of State. If the Minister for Trade is to conduct the negotiations, and if he is to take the same liberal attitude as the Secretary of State, what assurances can he give to the workers in my textile and carpet industries that they will be better off, if his attitude prevails, when the MFA has been concluded?

Mr. Clark: Some hon. Members may regret it, but it is a fact of life that negotiation is no longer possible bilaterally by the United Kingdom. Negotiations have to be conducted through the Community. The preparation of the mandate is going ahead. Certainly the interests of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents will be very much at the forefront of our considerations.

Mr. Dickens: Will my hon. Friend accept that the British textile industry employs more people than the National Coal Board and the British Steel Corporation added together? Does he agree that for the success of the surviving mills, despite the decline in the industry, he must negotiate a new MFA at the same time as he is conducting talks on GATT, which will take many years, as he knows?

Mr. Clark: The multi-fibre arrangement negotiations will be completed well before the next round of negotiations on GATT. My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the very large number of people in the United Kingdom who depend for their employment on the textile industry. It is around the half million mark.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend has an exceptional reputation for his interest in the national interest of the United Kingdom. Will he assure the House today that he will ensure a robust renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement so that the manufacturing base of this country is not further eroded? I speak not only on behalf of employers but on behalf of trade unions and the work force in the industry when I say that if he fails to do so tens of thousands of people will be out of work. Will he act accordingly in the national interest?

Mr. Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the compliment that he paid me. It is not fair to make a general accusation that the entire textile industry depends for its existence on the perpetuation of the MFA in its present form. The industry is extremely efficient and it would not wish to take refuge in a blindly protectionist attitude. None the less, I am aware of the concern expressed from wide circles in the industry. The negotiations will be long and complex and many different views will be expressed from within the Community in putting the mandate together. I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall take heed of what he says and of the wide variety of representations that I have received on this subject.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister accept that during the lifetime of the existing MFA more than 2,000 jobs in the British textile and clothing industries have been lost, and that that vividly illustrates the need for a strong and effective renewed MFA? Does he also accept that there are important investment decisions riding on the outcome of the MFA negotiations? If he will not accept that from me, will he accept it from the chief executive of Vantona Viyella, who said recently that his company had invested £50 million in the past two years and was prepared to spend more, but that the decision rested on the outcome of the MFA renegotiations? Will he also understand that what he has said will be seen as extremely disturbing throughout many constituencies, represented in some cases by the Minister's hon. Friends, and that if the British textile and clothing industries — *[Interruption]* — sold out by — *[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very unfair to ask such a long question, which denies other hon. Members a chance to speak.

Mr. Clark: I think that the House showed its impatience with the hon. Member's question by making three quarters of it inaudible. Every job loss is regrettable, but if he really regards the loss of 2,000 jobs out of a work force of 500,000 as being significant——

Mr. Alan Williams: Two thousand a month.

Mr. Clark: The fact is that the industry is efficient and its exports to certain markets, for example, Japan, have increased at a fast rate. It is not correct to regard the whole industry as requiring perpetual protection under the mechanism of the MFA. Our business is to ensure that when the MFA is renewed, it is done on the basis of hard-headed negotiation, first in the Community and then in the countries concerned, to the mutual advantage of both.

Mr. O'Brien: In view of the Minister's replies, does he agree that it is time that Her Majesty's Government took a hard line in the negotiations in the EEC on trade arrangements, as the softly softly approach will hinder or damage the MFA, which will mean a further loss of jobs? Is not the price of the softly softly approach too great for the textile industry?

Mr. Clark: I reject the idea that negotiations can be conducted on either hard line or softly softly terms. They are a matter of balance, and what has to be weighed is reciprocal merit of advantage and concessions.

Manufactured Goods

9. **Mr. Michie** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will indicate the nature and size of the current deficit in the balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Channon: Within the overall surplus on the current account of £3·5 billion in 1985, there was a deficit on manufactures of £3·1 million.

Mr. Michie: I represent a Sheffield constituency which is famous for its manufactured goods, and we view with concern this continuing deficit. Is this what the Government call economic progress? Will the Minister make it clear that the Government's present policy is not taking us down the road of economic recovery with prosperity round the corner, but is running our manufacturing industry into the ground and making sure that many of our workers are living shorter lives, through worry and depression? The decent thing for the Minister to do is to get out of office and so give us a chance to stop being a country with nothing more than a chain of American-owned hamburger stalls.

Mr. Channon: The hon. Gentleman grossly exaggerates. Manufacturing industrial output is well into its fifth year of growth. Continuing growth is indicated by recent forecasts. Fixed investment in manufacturing for the first three quarters of 1985 is 8 per cent. higher than a year ago and, as I said, manufacturing exports, for example, are at record levels in volume and value.

Mr. Forth: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that manufacturing investment is up, productivity is up, output is up and exports are up? Does he not find great encouragement from those facts, and will he therefore condemn the constant pessimism from the Opposition and reaffirm the optimism that we have in the manufacturing sector?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is right on all those points. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) does not believe him because he does not want to believe the facts.

Mr. Skinner: Of course I do not. They do not believe in the right hon. Gentleman outside.

Mr. Channon: The Opposition want to have only a gloomy story. They do not like good news, and my hon. Friend has told us what the good news is.

Mr. John Smith: Will the Secretary of State accept that the facts point out that the Government inherited a substantial surplus in the balance of trade of manufactured goods and now we have a huge deficit? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us why that has occurred under the Government's economic management and what they intend to do to put it right? Will he please answer both parts of the question?

Mr. Channon: The answer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman is that manufacturing output is up and has been up for 1984 and 1985. It is well up on its trough in 1981. Manufacturing investment is substantially up, non-oil export volume is substantially up, the real rate of return for manufacturing companies is up and manufacturing productivity is also substantially up. Let us stop all the moaning that we hear from the Opposition.

Westland plc

13. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to facilitate a decision by the board of Westland plc about the future structure and ownership of the company; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Information Technology (Mr. Geoffrey Pattie): The Government's aim throughout has been to enable the Westland's board to decide what reconstruction of the company to recommend to shareholders based on a choice between viable alternative proposals and in which the shareholders could take the final decision.

Mr. Dykes: What is the Government's reaction to today's developments at the meeting?

Mr. Pattie: I understand that a motion to adjourn the extraordinary general meeting of the company has been proposed and defeated and that the meeting is still going on. My understanding is that the result of the substantive motion will not be known until later this afternoon.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Has the Minister learnt any lessons from the Westland affair?

Mr. Pattie: I think that all of us are in a position to learn about any affair.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will my hon. Friend accept that the events of this morning at the extraordinary general meeting made it clear, as never before, that some people seem to be interested only in wrecking a solution to the Westland crisis? Will he do all that he can to appeal to all those involved, particularly competitors, to do all in their power to ensure that Westland recovers well, prospers and goes from strength to strength?

Mr. Pattie: The final part of my hon. Friend's question is exactly what we would wish Westland to achieve. I think that all of us in the House believe that the sooner the Westland company can get on with the reconstruction and the business of building helicopters, the better it will be.

Mr. John Smith: Does the Minister think that it is appropriate that the future of such an important company, in terms of its industrial and defence consequences, should be decided by a series of doubtful financial wheelings and dealings and, in the event, by anonymous Swiss bank nominees?

Mr. Pattie: I do not accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's construction. None of the dealings are anonymous. As he well knows, powers exist for a company to ascertain the names of those who own shares. There is no reason why the extraordinary general meeting should not reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Sterling Metals (Nuneaton)

14. **Mr. Park** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from Sterling Metals of Nuneaton and its existing customers about the consequences of the closure of its iron foundry on imports of components currently supplied by Sterling Metals.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry has been notified about the impending closure of the Sterling Metals, iron foundry. No representations have been received either from the company or its customers about consequential effects upon the import of components, although I have had a letter from the hon. Gentleman on that matter.

Mr. Park: Is the Minister aware that the major reason for the closure is unfair competition from Spain and Brazil? If so, what action has he taken?

Mr. Morrison: I do not entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. I have heard such allegations and my Department, through the Commission, would take up that point if it could be substantiated.

Mr. Lewis Stevens: Will my hon. Friend instigate an investigation into the allegations, especially as they are not only of recent date? Would it not be worth pursuing the matter at a departmental level? The possible threat is not only to this company, but to other British foundries.

Mr. Morrison: I am quite happy to do what my hon. Friend has suggested, and will investigate the matter again. He will appreciate that now that Spain has joined the European Community, the position has changed radically.

Home Taping

15. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the effects on the recording industry of home taping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The record industry has made many representations expressing its concerns about the effects of home taping. It submitted a formal response to the 1985 Green Paper "The Recording and Rental of Audio and Video Copyright Material" — Cmnd. 9445 — and has reiterated its concerns since then.

Mr. Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that every day millions of people in this country copy music from records, pre-recorded tapes and the radio? Is he further aware that nine of every 10 tapes sold are used for that purpose? Is that not a breach of copyright? Is it not disgraceful that authors, composers and artists receive no benefit from that activity? Will my hon. Friend consider introducing a royalty levy on the sale of blank tapes?

Mr. Pattie: It is precisely the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend and others that are being weighed carefully in the preparation of the Government's White Paper on this subject.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the industry makes an enormous contribution to the British economy and, indeed, is the most successful of its kind in the world? When will he make an announcement on this matter?

Mr. Pattie: I accept the hon. Gentleman's comment about the importance of the industry to the United Kingdom. The White Paper will be published in the near future, perhaps shortly after Easter.

Mr. Richard Page: Is it not true that certain continental countries were faced with exactly the same problem, but overcame it by the introduction of a levy on blank tapes?

Mr. Pattie: My hon. Friend is correct.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is not only a matter of levy, but involves the whole question of copyright? When will his Department tackle that minefield, which so badly needs tackling, not only in this respect, but in many other areas?

Mr. Pattie: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that a White Paper on the whole subject of intellectual property, innovation and copyright is in an advanced state of preparation.

Mr. Watts: Could not the recording industry do much to combat the problem of home taping by not allowing its music to be broadcast? Is it not the case, however, that it benefits from free advertising? Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the concern in many quarters, especially among those providing talking newspapers for the blind, about the possible outcome of a levy on blank tapes on the valuable service that they provide?

Mr. Pattie: The interests of the blind will be most carefully considered and safeguarded should any proposals be put forward along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend.

Trade Marks

16. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the registration as trade marks of commonly used national emblems.

Mr. Pattie: The Government have no intention of introducing legislation to amend the law on that subject.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is the Minister aware that that answer will be greeted with great disappointment north of the border? Is he aware that The Scotch House has recently acquired the exclusive patent rights to the use of the lion rampant, which is an insignia that has been used for many years by a wide range of knitwear manufacturers in Scotland? Will he reconsider the decision and try to restore the lion rampant to the public domain?

Mr. Pattie: The position is not as the hon. Gentleman describes. The Scotch House has registered a lion as its trade mark, but it is not, as has been suggested in some quarters, the lion of Scotland. The lion of Scotland is a national emblem and cannot be registered as a trade mark. The Scotch House has simply registered a lion as a trade mark. Many lions exist in different forms. I happen to have here many examples of different lions. It is open to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and the companies involved to submit other designs——

Mr. John Smith: Other lions.

Mr. Pattie: Provided that the test of distinctiveness can be satisfied, that mark would also be registered.

Mr. Marlow: Would it not be a good idea if cars assembled within the United Kingdom were stamped with the Union Jack? Would that not help the general public, who are desperately keen to buy British cars?

Mr. Pattie: I am sure that my hon. Friend's suggestion will be noted in the appropriate quarters.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that while he is sitting on his backside in the Department, many products carrying the Union Jack mark are being dumped on our shores and they are not even made here? I want to know what he is going to do about it.

Mr. Pattie: I do not believe that that arises out a question about the lion of Scotland, but it is an important issue and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will table a question about the matter next time.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

19. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current state of negotiations on the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Negotiations in the GATT on renewal of the MFA are still at an early stage, and discussions in the Community on a mandate for the negotiations are continuing. It is too early to say whether we are likely to achieve our objectives as described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 1985, but the Community has agreed that an extension of the MFA is needed.

Mr. Lewis: Is the Minister aware that close on £2 billion has been invested by the industry during the past 10 years and that, compared with foreign competitors, it has kept prices at a reasonable level? Is that not enough to suggest to the Minister that he should go out with all guns blazing and come back to the House with a strengthened multi-fibre arrangement?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman heard what my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade had to say earlier. My hon. Friend is a good negotiator. He will be balancing the advantages and taking serious account of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. John Townend: Is my hon. Friend aware that even efficient clothing producers, such as Dewhurst in my constituency, which supplies Marks and Spencers, believe that it is vital for their continued prosperity that the MFA should be renewed on the same basis as the present arrangement?

Mr. Morrison: I am aware of the efficiency of Dewhurst in my hon. Friend's constituency. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and I will take account of what he has said.

Mr. Fatchett: On a recent visit to Leeds the Minister said that he would give proper protection to the Leeds clothing industry against the importation of men's cheap suits. What did he mean by proper protection?

Mr. Morrison: I believe that it was men's trousers. In consultation with my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, I have been considering the whole matter with the British Clothing Industries Association. If action must be taken, it will be.

Land Rover

20. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to privatise the Land Rover division of British Leyland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Discussions are in progress between BL and General Motors with the aim of creating an internationally competitive United Kingdom commercial vehicle industry. These talks cover Leyland Trucks, Land Rover, Freight Rover and certain related overseas companies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As Jaguar has flourished in the private sector, why has my hon. Friend not pursued a similar course with Land Rover? What can Land Rover gain from General Motors that could not be achieved by privatisation in a British market?

Mr. Morrison: Obviously my right hon. Friend and I and the whole of the BL board must carefully take into account the prospects for the future of Land Rover when it goes into the hands of the private sector. The board believes that the prospects for Land Rover and Range Rover will be greatly enhanced if, subject to the conditions that my right hon. Friend announced in the House last week, they team up with General Motors.

Mr. Terry Davis: As no one in the senior mangagement of British Leyland will admit to being involved in the discussions, will the Minister name the members of the BL board who are involved in trying to sell off the British motor industry?

Mr. Morrison: I am amazed at that question. I do not know the names of all the people involved. There have been negotiations at many levels—technical, commercial and industrial. Several people have been involved in the negotiations across the board.

21. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about negotiations taking place between General Motors and Leyland Truck and the involvement of Land Rover.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Discussions are in progress between BL and General Motors with the aim of creating an internationally competitive United Kingdom commercial vehicle industry.

Mr. Taylor: As my hon. Friend is considering the options, will he include among them a management buy-out and accept the importance of a significant involvement of employees of the company in that scheme?

Mr. Morrison: That will initially be a matter for the BL board. Certainly as regards the future of Land Rover and Range Rover, it is important that any deal that they come to is a deal that they and the Government consider to be the best for enhancing their prospects and the prospects of my hon. Friend's constituency and the thousands of his constituents who work there.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Has General Motors made the inclusion of the Land Rover division of British Leyland a condition of its acquisition of that division? If not, why will the hon. Gentleman not listen to the views of the management and unions at Land Rover and to the view of both sides of the House and consider a future for Land Rover outside the deal with General Motors?

Mr. Morrison: At this stage, General Motors has not put forward any formal proposition. It would be fair to say that General Motors is looking at the three constituent parts about which I have already told the House.

Under-age Girls (Contraception)

3.32 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidelines his Department proposes to issue following the GMC's advice to doctors regarding the circumstances in which they involve the parents of under-16-year-old patients when prescribing contraceptives.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): As the House is aware, the existing DHSS guidance on this issue is being revised to take account of the Law Lords' judgments and the wide range of views expressed on the matter. The revised guidance will advise those doctors and others concerned about the considerations that they need to have in mind when giving contraceptive advice or treatment to under-16-year-olds. I will, of course, also take into account the new guidance approved by the General Medical Council yesterday. I hope to issue the revised DHSS guidance shortly.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the right hon. Gentleman apply his mind to issuing the guidance quickly? I believe that powers must be available to doctors to involve parents in exceptional circumstances, but there is worry and anxiety in the BMA, and a hiatus has been caused by the GMC ruling. Will the right hon. Gentleman end that hiatus, because it is in no one's interest that girls of 16 and under should continue to be exposed to the risk of pregnancy?

Mr. Hayhoe: The GMC is an independent statutory body, for which the Government are not accountable in any way. Therefore, it is not appropriate for me to comment on the advice that it gives to the medical profession. I have said that I hope to issue the DHSS guidance shortly.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): What does my right hon. Friend make of the statement of the president of the GMC that he still hopes that the vast majority of doctors will not inform parents? When my right hon. Friend is considering guidelines, will he bear in mind the weight of evidence that adverse medical effects can be present among young girls, particularly if they are receiving other medical treatment from their doctors? Will he insist that doctors at least tell GPs?

Mr. Hayhoe: I am not aware of the statement to which my hon. Friend refers. I hope that no one in the House, or outside, would seek to undermine or diminish parental responsibility in these matters in any way.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Minister be very clear when he is writing his guidelines that if 16-year-olds are asked by the doctor concerned whether they want their parents told, and they make it clear that they do not, it is essential that their confidentiality should be respected? If that is not so, and if the girls are not told that, we shall get more and more illegitimate children through there being no faith in the confidentiality of the consultation.

Mr. Hayhoe: The position is that confidentiality must be for the individual doctor, guided by the advice of the General Medical Council.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my hon. Friend not accept that it is in the best interests of the under-age girl that parental responsibility and family stability should be fostered by the new guidelines which he will introduce? Does he not agree that doctors should be under an obligation to tell the parents of girls who are being placed upon the pill that that is happening, rather than having that right conferred upon them? This will in itself give proper protection to all girls. Is that not what we should be seeking to do?

Mr. Hayhoe: I think it very important that nothing is done to diminish or undermine parental responsibility in this matter.

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): Is the Minister confident that the revised guidance will serve to reduce the appalling number of teenage pregnancies?

Mr. Hayhoe: I am concerned at the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies and the number of abortions. I think hon. Members in all parts of the House will be concerned about the numbers, and I would not wish the guidance which is given by my Department to make matters worse. The intention of the guidance is to take account of the Law Lords' judgment on this matter, and to take into account the social and moral concern that has been widely expressed on this issue.

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Does my hon. Friend not think that this institutionalisation of a breach of confidentiality on a subjective judgment is the thin end of the wedge for general practitioners and medical practitioners? Young girls who go to them are socially responsible. Despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) said, it has nothing to do with parents whether there are adverse or non-adverse effects on children or young people who are prescribed contraceptives; it is a matter of clinical judgment. That is not affected by whether parents know or do not know.

Mr. Hayhoe: I received only this morning the revised guidance which the General Medical Council approved yesterday and have not had time to give it the careful consideration which it deserves. I believe in these matters that careful consideration is much preferred to instant comment.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Minister aware that many of us in the Life lobby have found the position of Victoria Gillick very hard to stomach, and that that is one of the issues which has divided many of us? Is he aware that the General Medical Council's guidance note may be an excellent compromise?

Mr. Hayhoe Rather than comment upon the guidance which was approved by the GMC yesterday, I believe that it would be right for me to give it careful consideration, and I shall take it into account along with the other matters that I have described before I issue the revised DHSS guidance, which I hope to do shortly.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are hundreds of thousands of caring parents who wish to know what will be the position of 13 and 14-year-old children in the revised guidelines? At that stage in their lives they need all the love and care of a secure home and the knowledge that their families care.

Mr. Hayhoe: The stability of family relationships and parental responsibility are matters that we must all take fully into account.

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): Is the Minister aware that many young girls consult their parents but that many find that they cannot? I echo the outrage of the British Medical Association at the confusion which the General Medical Council's guidelines will cause for doctors and their patients. The guidelines make the situation worse than it was before Mrs. Gillick brought her case. They provide virtually a licence for doctors to do as they like.

Will the Minister clarify the fact that a young girl seeking advice on contraception will have to talk to her doctor before she knows whether he will inform her parents? Surely this uncertainty will mean that she will not consult him at all. She will not do so unless she has some sort of assurance beforehand. What does the Minister propose to do — we look forward to receiving his guidelines—to improve the service for young people to avoid the unwanted pregnancies to which he referred? In 1983—the most recent year for which he has given me figures—over half of these unwanted pregnancies were terminated.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Tell them not do it.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am glad that the hon. Lady is awaiting the revised guidance, which I shall be issuing after having given careful consideration to the guidance issued and approved by the General Medical Council yesterday.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the very thought that parents might be informed by the doctor will be a substantial deterrent to girls indulging in under-age sex? Given the extremely alarming figures that are now emerging, and which the House debated only recently, of cervical cancer among the very young, would it not be very desirable to have this deterrent in s[illegible]

Mr. Hayhoe: I note what my hon. Friend has said, as I have noted the remarks of hon. Members in all parts of the House on this important issue. I shall take all views into account in preparing the revised guidance that I hope to issue shortly.

Immigration (Members' Representations)

3.38 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that yesterday, Mr. Speaker, following a point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), who had been contacted by a journalist before 1 pm about a written answer that it was expected would be released that day, you said during the ensuing exchanges:

> "I would deprecate the giving of a written answer to the press before it has been given to the hon. Member concerned. That is clearly in breach of our conventions."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. 793.]

A written answer was provided yesterday, by the Home Secretary and not by the Minister of State. It was not a casual written answer, for it had attached to it a five-page document of 19 paragraphs setting out completely a new policy to be folowed by the Home Secretary. The contents of the document included a number of matters which the journalist who had spoken on the telephone to my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood had told her would be included in the written answer.

There seem to be only two alternative possibilities, both of which are discreditable. One is that there was a leak from the Home Office to the press. The second possibility is that the Home Office—this must have been via the Home Secretary — deliberately committed what you described yesterday, Mr. Speaker, as a "breach of our conventions", which you deprecated, and supplied a written answer to a journalist two and a half hours before it was the property of Parliament.

As the Leader of the House responded, towards the end of those exchanges, by saying that he would draw the attention of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to the allegations, and as the Opposition have sought today from the Home Secretary a statement to the House of Commons—which is the proper way in which a major new statement of policy ought to be made—I ask you, Mr. Speaker, firstly to give us your advice about what we can do in future when there is a breach of our conventions and secondly to assist us in obtaining a response from the Leader of the House, following the undertaking that he gave yesterday.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. I have nothing to add to what I said yesterday in the column of *Hansard* that was mentioned by the right hon. Member.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does not this depend upon whether or not the document was embargoed?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: I know nothing about that. I repeat to the House what I said yesterday: that it is a bad practice for members of the press, or for anyone else, for that matter, to be given information before Members of this House.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Waddington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that a press officer at the Home Office was rung up yesterday morning and asked about the question

[Mr. David Waddington]

on the Order Paper. The questioner was told that an answer was to be given that afternoon. No answer was given to the journalist.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Now we are going down a track that we hit on Friday. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) quite rightly drew to my attention the fact that we are getting, in effect, statements on points of order. Since that was, in effect, a statement, I shall have to treat it as such.

Mr. Kaufman: May I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that as the answer was given in the name of the Home Secretary, not the Minister of State, it would have been proper for the Home Secretary to come to the House to make a statement this afternoon and not to send his junior Minister? May I put it to you, Mr. Speaker — *[Interruption.]* Well, may I put it to the Minister that this journalist, to whom his press officer spoke, must have been a person of amazing invention and telepathic ability. After having, apparently, only been told by the Home Office press officer that an answer would be given, he was able to conjure out of his imagination a good deal of the content of the answer.

It was passed by the journalist to my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood because the journalist wished to have my hon. Friend's comments. They were then passed by my hon. Friend to me, which meant that I was in possession of that information, too. This is a very curious way of keeping Parliament informed. After the sieve-like nature of Downing street and Government Departments in the last few weeks, will the Minister pursue the matter of a leak by a press officer which seems, like the one from Miss Collette Bowe and Mr. Bernard Ingham, to have been an authorised leak?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said that I shall have to treat this as a statement, so I cannot answer that question.

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Waddington: I do not think that I can add anything to what I have already said. I have told the House that my understanding is that this journalist rang up the Home Office. I have also told the House my understanding of what he was told. I cannot take the matter any further.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I add one further matter for correction in the internal workings of the Home Office? When we debated last night the Home Office precept order for the police——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What the hon. Gentleman says must relate to the Minister of State's response.

Mr. Hughes: It does relate to it. We were told by the Minister of State, who is on the Treasury Bench, that earlier that day there had been an announcement—not to this House—of an increase in the police grant from 50 per cent. to 51 per cent. and of an increase in rate support grant of £22 million. Is it Home Office policy now to pre-empt matters to be announced in the House by a few hours through procedures other than those of the House —statement or question? If that is so, people outside the House will yet again be given information before the House about material which is highly relevant and which is about to be debated in the House. Hon. Members may well not know the information that the Government have let into the public domain from a Department when it is relevant first to the Order Paper.

Mr. Waddington: That matter has nothing whatsoever to do with the question that was addressed to me and the matter with which I was dealing. I shall communicate to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is this absolutely necessary? This morning we were not advised that there would be a statement. It is not a statement, with respect, but a point of order. Is it necessary for my hon. and learned Friend the Minister to answer questions?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present last week when, on two occasions, points of order were used as a basis for a sort of statement. After the events of last Friday I said that if this happened again, I would have to treat it as a statement, and I am afraid that I must do that.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not the case that when we are to have a statement we need to be informed in advance, so that we can question Ministers? Since there has been no information in advance, surely these proceedings are out of order?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is the normal practice. It is unwise of Ministers to answer points of order with a statement because that means that hon. Members are not given the opportunity to question them properly.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that the substance of the matter is of far more interest to hon. Members, who must deal with large numbers of immigration cases, than the method of disclosure? Will he accept that the proposals of our right hon. Friend the Home Secretary reflect such basic common sense that anyone of reasonable intelligence who is well-informed could have put them together? They are certainly welcome to me and, I suspect, to my right hon. and hon. Friends who must operate these procedures.

Mr. Waddington: The answer is yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert Atkins: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the point of order is not on the same subject because——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Robert Atkins.

Mr. Atkins: Surely it was not my hon. and learned Friend the Minister who raised a point of order, as you suggested, but the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)?

Mr. Speaker: I did not say that. I said that we were tending to get into the bad habit of using points of order to obtain statements.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Since the Minister in effect answered the point of order and as I said on Friday that if that happened again, I would have to treat it as a statement, I must do so.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This wastes a great deal of time. I call Mrs. Kellett-Bowman.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Mr. Speaker, I seek your guidance because I was hoping to raise a point about questions at the conclusion of Question Time——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Lady would do it then.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If these occasions arise in future, is it necessary for my hon. and learned Friend the Minister to answer the questions put to him? He may want to answer them, but is he required to do so? Can you rule on that for the future? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not responsible for the way in which Ministers answer questions, but I am responsible for keeping to the rules of the House. If, in effect, statements are made on a point of order, they must be treated as statements. I hope that it may not happen often. I call Ms. Clare Short.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As we are now having a statement, could you direct that the monitors show that we are having a statement from the Home Office on immigration rules, for the benefit of hon. Members who are not in the Chamber?

Mr. Speaker: I suppose that that is in order.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): This is a serious matter and it has been going on for some time. It started with the Minister making wild allegations at Question Time and was followed by his Department leaking to the *Daily Telegraph* private letters that I had written to constituents, and information about representations that various hon. Members had made on behalf of their constituents. That must be a breach of the Official Secrets Act. All this has been going on, but we have had no chance to debate or discuss it in the House.

The Minister then came up with a series of proposals to deal with what he alleged was an abuse. We do not accept that it was an abuse, yet we have never had a chance to say so. The Minister made a statement through a written answer—that was inappropriate—and journalists were told in advance of the broad contents of the proposal, although I do not believe that they had the whole answer. It is proposed that, in future, Members of Parliament will have to start acting like immigration officers, ringing Heathrow airport, and so on to get the full story.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Short: No, I shall not. The journalist concerned knew all this. He had approached me for a comment. I was unable to make one, having been — *[Interruption.]* Seriously, this cannot be a reasonable way of proceeding in the House. The Leader of the House should look at this as an example of hon. Members being put into a position where they are not allowed to answer properly for themselves. He should give undertakings that this use of a written answer for leaking to the press will not happen again.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Let the Minister answer.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the Minister want to answer?

Mr. Waddington: I did not hear a question addressed to me.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a point of order. It is a question.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I am asking for your guidance, Mr. Speaker. Will you enlighten me? A Member such as myself who wishes to raise a point during questions is not permitted to do so. You prefer the matter to be put at the end of Question Time. Will you be kind enough to tell me, in view of today's events, how I can raise with you the point that Opposition Members' questions were far too long and suggest that, as a retaliatory measure, you call two Conservative Members to one Opposition Member?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady is always very helpful. I have already told her that I shall call her point of order after this exchange. She is second in the queue.

Ms. Short: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: This is an Opposition day.

Ms. Short: I am saying that the Minister misled the House. He said——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No right hon. or hon. Member misleads the House.

Ms. Short: Perhaps inadvertently; but the words he uttered in the point of order, which has now become a statement, gave information to hon. Members about what was said to the journalist in question which was not correct. That is the point I am putting. It is an extremely serious point. I should have thought that the Minister would want to answer it.

Mr. Waddington: If the hon. Lady is now putting a question to me, let me state absolutely categorically that no answer to no parliamentary question was given to that journalist.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The draft regulations which the Government announced yesterday by means of a written answer affect the rights of Members of both Houses of Parliament. Will the Minister of State confirm that there has been no consultation between the Government and the parties represented in the House?

[Mr. Max Madden]

Will he, therefore, in the absence of proper consultation, withdraw the draft regulations to enable consultation to take place?

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that an internal inquiry is taking place in the Home Office into the apparent breach of the Official Secrets Act 1911 by the management of the immigration service or officials in his department in disclosing information to the *Daily Telegraph* about the representations of Members of Parliament on immigration matters which was published on 3 December? Has that inquiry been completed? If not, will the hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that the matters that have been raised through today's statement are investigated in the same inquiry?

Mr. Waddington: The draft guidelines have been published so that there can be consultation. I have written to the hon. Gentleman and many other hon. Members inviting them to give their comments. That is obviously, I submit, the correct way to proceed. The other matter raised by the hon. Gentleman has nothing to do with the question that has been raised this afternoon.

Mr. Dickens: Does the Minister accept that the House is suffering this afternoon from a dose of leakitis brought about by a dose of strong helicopteritis a few weeks ago? Will the Minister confirm that there is a close working relationship between the press in the House of Commons, hon. Members, Ministers and shadow Ministers? Therefore, is it not right for the press, which does its job lawfully and properly, at times to deduce and make assumptions about what might be in a Minister's mind? Is this not fair work by the lobby correspondents? What is all this fuss about?

Mr. Waddington: I really do not know. I raised the matter this afternoon because, under the guise of a point of order, a serious allegation was made. I replied to that allegation and said that it was absolute nonsense.

Mr. Kaufman: Does not the Minister agree that this discreditable shambles in which he has been involved could have been avoided if the Government had responded to today's formal request from the Opposition for a formal, properly made statement which hon. Members would have known about and on which they could have asked questions? We are not satisfied with the Minister's evasive answer about the leak. I make it absolutely clear to him that there is no way in which Opposition Members will agree in future to make representations to a civil servant who is responsible to the Minister rather than to the Minister.

Mr. Waddington: I am surprised, after the time the right hon. Gentleman has taken up this afternoon, that he should prolong proceedings any further. He started out with a point of order in which he must have known there was no substance. It followed a point of order he made yesterday and to which I understand a detailed reply was given through the usual channels. Therefore he knew, before he raised the matter this afternoon, that there was no substance in it.

Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Point of order — Mrs. Kellett-Bowman.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I wish to raise with you, Mr. Speaker, what happens when Opposition Members such as the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) ask long questions, thus precluding other hon. Members from doing so. Would it not be possible and salutary in such circumstances to call two hon. Members on the opposite side in succession to those who have erred?

Mr. Speaker: That is not possible, but I balance it out in different ways. If the hon. Lady looks at *Hansard* tomorrow she will see that I did that.

Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take Mr. Winnick.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I am still waiting to get in on the statement.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Since the Minister has seen fit to criticise your ruling, Mr. Speaker, allowing the statement to be made, may I ask whether there are not two separate and unrelated issues here? One important matter raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to the leak. The other matter is equally important and, perhaps, Mr. Speaker, concerns you as a constituency Member as much as it does the rest of us. What is proposed will undoubtedly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to pursue the statement on a point of order, because that would get us into serious trouble.

Mr. Winnick *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: No. This is an Opposition day and we are eating into it. The hon. Gentleman must reserve what he wishes to say on this matter until we have a debate, and that goes for the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds).

Mr. Winnick: On this point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to continue the questions on the statement. I am sorry that I was not able to call him, but he will have to find another way of being called. Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: Today we have witnessed a little bit of history-making, in the sense that during the past week you, Mr. Speaker, quite properly said that the Government had twice used a point of order to make a statement. The Government would deny that, of course, but that is what it looked like.

You have done the House a service, Mr. Speaker, by telling the Government that when they do this a third time the matter must be debated properly in the House. It would appear from the Minister's last remark that the Government are not taking kindly to points of order being turned into statements.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Too right.

Mr. Skinner: We on the Opposition Benches welcome that, even though some of us did not get called. In view of the current misunderstandings that are taking place on the Government Benches, the leaks and all the rest of it, we welcome the fact that, when this takes place in the future, we shall have an opportunity to do the same to bring the Government to heel.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that we need to pursue this. The hon. Gentleman raised this matter twice last week and I think he was entirely correct.

Mr. Faulds: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes?

Mr. Faulds: I had hoped to get in on the statement to ask a question which would have made some sense. As we have not heard——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope the hon. Gentleman will not seek to ask a question now.

Mr. Faulds: No, I was simply trying to make the point that some of us try to get in on questions and do not abuse points of order. I am now forced to use a point of order. It is quite clear that the exchanges on these issues have been extremely unsatisfactory. Can we now have an assurance that the Home Secretary will come to the Dispatch Box, but not on a point of order, to make a statement to the House so that these matters can be properly pursued?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY

Members successful in the ballot were:
Sir William van Straubenzee
Mr. Andrew Rowe
Mr. Gary Waller

Protection of Animals Act 1911 (Amendment)

4.6 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend sections 1 and 15 of the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and for connected purposes.

It is somewhat ironic to introduce today's Bill as a ten-minute Bill when on Monday the House will debate and pass a Bill which will protect animals subject to research procedures in laboratories. We seek to protect those animals because we have a high regard for their dignity. These animals should not be abused even on occasions when lives are being saved and remedies are found for many dangerous diseases that afflict us.

My Bill seeks to protect animals which are not used for such a noble purpose but those whose lives are put at risk for the selfish pleasure of a privileged few. They seek to delight in the idea that a hare should be the subject of a tug of war between two greyhounds, that a fox should be pursued for miles until exhausted and is turned at bay to be ripped to pieces by hounds, or that a stag should be chased to the point of exhaustion when it either rushes into the sea trying to save itself and drowns or is savaged by a pack of hounds. Those of us who support the Bill are of the opinion that, in our civilised society, there is no justification for continuing these practices.

My Bill would make two small but vital amendments to the Protection of Animals Act 1911. It does not have the range and vision of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) about a fortnight ago, but it tackles a problem which the House can properly put to rights.

The Bill would add to the definition of cruelty thus:

> "(*f*) shall hunt with one or more dogs wholly or mainly for the purpose of sport any animal with intent to pursue, take or kill same".

The Bill would also put a responsibility on the occupier or owner of the land not to permit its use for such a purpose. That is common practice in the areas of many progressive shire counties. The Bill would also redefine "animal" so as to cover any mammal. The amended Act would therefore specifically and directly make it an offence to hunt, and cover all animals in the wild.

The 1911 Act protects wild animals to a limited extent. It prohibits as cruel the baiting of an animal in a confined space if it is wild, but it is not considered cruel if the baiting is done in the open. It would be considered cruel to put dogs into a cage with a fox or a hare, but it would not be considered cruel to bring them together in an open field. That cannot be a proper way in which to treat animals.

If amended, the Act would cover cruel and vicious practices involving the use of crossbows, airguns and other methods of snaring, killing and trapping animals. It would make it an offence to allow animals to be hunted or pursued in such a manner.

I realise that there are pressures on the House and that we are eating into Opposition time, but I should like to refer to some public opinion polls on the matter. Some people are saying that the issue is political and that we are trying to gain votes. An NOP Market Research Ltd poll of 1983 found that 65 per cent. of respondents disapproved

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

of fox hunting and that 11 per cent. approved. As for political opinion, 54 per cent. of Conservative voters disapproved and 80 per cent. of Labour voters disapproved. However, 53 per cent. of rural opinion disapproved. On hare coursing, 80 per cent. disapproved, as did,78 per cent. of Conservative voters, 86 per cent. of Labour voters and 77 per cent. of rural opinion. On stag hunting, 81 per cent. disapproved, as did 76 per cent. of Conservative voters, 88 per cent. of Labour voters and 79 per cent. of rural opinion. On hare hunting, 70 per cent. disapproved, as did 62 per cent. of Conservative voters, 79 per cent. of Labour voters and 66 per cent. of rural opinion.

The background shows that this is not a party political matter—it has the support of the overwhelming majority of the population. As for the fight for votes that is going on, any party that could claim 40 per cent. would claim a majority in the House, but here at least 66 per cent. are in favour of legislation to stop these cruel and barbaric practices.

The latest Gallup poll on the subject found that, in some cases, people in county constituencies are more worried about hunting than people in urban ones. Nevertheless, the percentage who opposed hunting was extremely high, and the difference between the county and urban response was only a few per cent. For example, 74 per cent. of respondents in county constituencies disapproved of stag hunting whereas 73 per cent. of urban ones disapproved. For hare coursing, 72 per cent. of county respondents disapproved, while the urban figure was 71 per cent. The roles were reversed in respect of fox hunting—66 per cent. of county respondents disapproving and 68 per cent. of urban ones disapproving. Those figures show that the vast majority of people want Parliament to legislate to abolish these sports.

The interesting feature is that the figures go across all social classes. A majority in every social class disapprove, as do a majority in every age group, especially between 16 and 24. This is a moral issue. Our treatment of wild animals reflects our society. I have never believed that animals are more important than human beings, and I do not exaggerate the importance of their well-being, but I believe that animals, which have been put here for the use of man, should be used sensibly and humanely—not abused for a cheap thrill from a savage and bloody sport.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 133, Noes 0.

Division No. 71] **[4.16 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Anthony
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clarke, Thomas
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Grist, Ian
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
Norris, Steven
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Bob Clay.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. Harry Cohen.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Kevin McNamara, Mr. J. D. Concannon, Dr. Oonagh McDonald, Mr. Joseph Ashton, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Robert Parry, Mr. David Winnick, Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Bob Clay, and Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS ACT 1911 (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Kevin McNamara accordingly presented a Bill to amend sections 1 and 15 of the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 March and to be printed. [Bill 82.]

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Economic Policy and Unemployment

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, I announce that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.28 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the callous and irresponsible economic policies pursued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which consistently promote higher unemployment through record real interest rates, constant cuts in public sector capital spending, the squandering of oil revenues and the destruction of the nation's manufacturing industry.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer should have come to speak in this debate. It is absurd that the most indiscreet Chancellor since the war should use the excuse of pre-Budget purdah as his reason for not doing so. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment, whatever their undoubted talents, are not directly and personally responsible for the policies which have trebled unemployment since the day the Tory party published the "Labour isn't working" poster.

The Chancellor is directly and personally responsible. He is the architect of the medium-term financial strategy. He is one of the few Cabinet Ministers who still believes in it. After the next election, I have no doubt that the two Ministers who will speak today will, when asked about their responsibility for the 3·4 million unemployed, merely answer that they were doing no more than carry out their superior's orders. It is the Chancellor's responsibility to speak. I, and I suspect many hon. Members on both sides of the House, resent the idea that he should duck out.

I wish to put a question about his direct responsibilities to the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment who will reply to the debate. Knowing, as he must, that the Government's reputation has been severely damaged over the past month by their dissembling and equivocation, does he think that the time has once again come to begin the publication of honest employment and unemployment statistics?

I shall explain what I mean, because, with little conviction, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is attempting to look puzzled. The total of registered unemployed has been constantly reduced over the past six years by statistical manipulation. Were we today debating the level of unemployed on the honest pre-1979 basis, the figure about which the Opposition complain would be 3·8 million and not 3·4 million. I shall quote on that subject from *The Economist*, a publication not noted for its unequivocal support of the Labour party. Ten days ago it stated:

"Adult unemployment has trebled under Mrs. Thatcher . . . Add in school leavers along with those removed by special employment measures and sleight of hand and make some allowance for dole fiddles and the true number of jobless could be nearly 4 million."

Over the manipulation of the figures, the Government once again combine incompetence and subterfuge in equal measures. They manipulate the unemployment figures to keep down the total but still record the highest level of unemployment in our history.

Claims made about employment and new jobs are even more bogus. The Government boast that 252,000 new jobs have been generated since March 1983. They add, for good measure, the guess that about 400,000 self-employed jobs have also been created during that time.

The Bank of England, like *The Economist* not an organ noted for its uncritical support of Labour party policies, gives the lie to the claim that 252,000 new jobs have been created. In its December quarterly bulletin, the Bank of England claimed that the economy has not generated 250,000 full-time jobs. It has not even generated 10 per cent. of that number. The economy has generated over the same time 24,000 full-time jobs. That is 24,000 new full-time jobs between the general election and the middle of last year. That is the creation of new jobs at the rate of 890 full-time new jobs each month. At that rate, it will take until 1998 merely to find new jobs for the 130,000 extra men and women who were put out of work last month alone.

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The right hon. Gentleman is making a rather serious attack on the integrity of the Department of Employment's statistical service. He knows that the published figures are all produced by the same staff, or their successors, who serviced the Government of which he was a member, and that when changes are made to the figures, the basis upon which the change is made is always published in the *Employment Gazette*. It is easy to follow the change closely. As he must have prepared this attack with care, will he state which change in the figures he is attacking and what he says has not been publicly stated to make the basis of the change clear?

Mr. Hattersley: The Paymaster General—the second Minister in the Department—says that I am making a serious attack on the Government's statistical service. I am doing no such thing. I am making a serious attack on the integrity of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Minister is correct: I have prepared the case carefully. I have given two examples and I shall give more if he wants. It was when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was Secretary of State for Employment that on his instructions the two changes were instituted. The statistical service faithfully carried them out.

It was the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster who said that the calculations should be made on claimants rather than those registering for work—reducing the total by 170,000. He said that men over 60 should not sign on—reducing the total by 107,000. I do not know why the Minister asked me that question if he thought that I did not know the answer. He must know the answer. He should, if he had the integrity with which I previously credited him, be ashamed to have to administer such a statistical manipulation.

I offer the Minister the suggestion that when he replies he should tell us how he feels about a Government who —I use the phrase again—notwithstanding the fact that they have manipulated the unemployment statistics, still record the highest unemployment level in our history since we could, if the Government chose, begin to put Britain

[Mr. Hattersley]

back to work. To achieve that objective, we need a Government who make the reduction of unemployment their highest priority.

The most frightening feature of last week's British Leyland fiasco is the confirmation that the only industrial strategy that the Government possess is to close and to sell. Their free market philosophy has now become such an obsession that they prefer American capitalism and redundancies to British enterprise and jobs. That same obsession has resulted in economic policies based on over-valued sterling and artificially high interest rates. They are two policies which make high unemployment inevitable and industrial collapse certain.

Real interest rates are now higher than at any time in our history. Sterling is valued at a level which subsidises imports and penalises exports. The country must know that. Industry tells it time after time, as it tells the Government, that their exchange rate and interest rate policy is bound to lead to higher and higher unemployment and further and further industrial collapse.

However, as the monthly unemployment figures are published, the Secretary of State for Employment, whoever he may be from time to time, always reacts in the same way. He expresses surprise and disappointment. He then goes on to reject all the policies which might bring down unemployment, basing his rejection on prejudice and ignorance.

I give the House the most recent example of that. On television on 4 February, Lord Young, the Secretary of State for Employment, wheeled out the old chestnut that the policy of public investment in the infrastructure, which everyone except the Cabinet believes is the right answer for this country, has failed abroad and would fail here. He said that public spending has failed to solve economic problems throughout the industrial world.

I shall give the Secretary of State for Employment the facts. I shall send him the figures later today. Between 1979 and 1984—the five most recent years for which figures are available—in America, France, Germany and Japan public expenditure increased faster than it did in Britain and so did gross domestic product. All those countries had a faster rate of growth than we did. All those countries had a slower rise in unemployment, and all except France had a better inflation record. If the Secretary of State correlates all those figures, he will see that there is an absolute relationship between Government capital expenditure and the health and welfare of those four major economies.

Mr. Richard Ryder (Mid-Norfolk): When the right hon. Gentleman is dealing with public expenditure, perhaps he could answer one question. Last Sunday the Leader of the Opposition said that extra public expenditure under a possible Labour Government on education, housing and construction would be financed by raising taxes for those earning over £30,000 a year. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us now how much extra revenue that would raise?

Mr. Hattersley: Yes. What is more, so did my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on television on Sunday. The figure he quoted was £3 billion, the amount which that uniquely lucky section of the population have obtained in tax concessions during the lifetime of this Government. They are the only people who have received the tax cuts about which the Government boasted and which they promised at the last election. The Leader of the Opposition said that it was unreasonable and unjust that only the richest 5 per cent. of the population should have enjoyed tax cuts under the Government and that it was right and necessary that they pay their fair contribution to the national welfare.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): If the right hon. Gentleman cares to check the transcript, he will see that his right hon. Friend said that the entire Labour programme of reconstruction could be financed by tax increases for those earning over £30,000. Is the right hon. Gentleman now saying that it is not the £40 billion that we heard about before, or £20 billion or £10 billion but just £3 billion? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Hattersley: It is neither what I am saying nor what my right hon. Friend said. In a moment I am prepared to tell the hon. Gentleman about some of the other areas from which money could and should come. I am pleased and proud to confirm that my right hon. Friend said that in a decent society one cannot allow the richest 5 per cent. to be the only beneficiaries from tax cuts that were promised to everybody.

I repeat that, in the countries which I have given as examples, higher levels of public expenditure have improved economic performance. Yet our Government stubbornly refuse even to consider reducing unemployment by increasing public sector capital investment. With 400,000 building workers on the dole it is absurd to argue that there is no shortage of demand. I do not advocate, nor have I ever advocated, indiscriminate reflation such as would come from generalised cuts in direct taxation. That would risk an unacceptable increase in inflation and added pressure on the balance of payments. We need directed reflation through capital spending on desperately needed houses, schools, hospitals and roads. The need is there; the manpower is there; the money is there; all that is lacking is the political will.

Creation of jobs by public sector investment is greeted by the Government with a single vacuous, ignorant question which the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) reproduced accurately a moment ago—where is all the money coming from? That was the response of the Paymaster General to the proposals of the Select Committee on Employment for new special employment measures for the long-term unemployed.

Long-term unemployment—that is, men and women who have been out of work for a year or more—totals 1,352,000. There are more long-term unemployed today than the unemployment total when the Government were elected. Perhaps even worse, there are now almost three times as many long-term unemployed men and women as there were during the most deeply damaging period in the inter-war slump. In fact, we are in the deepest depression in our history.

What is the Paymaster General's response to the idea that a modest sum might be spent to reduce long-term unemployment, to alleviate the suffering and to end the hardship involved? In regard to the cost of creating a few jobs he said:

> "It would be ironic if the cost caused greater damage to business and to the job market in other ways."

If that flaccid comment means anything, it is a complaint about the cost of job creation.

Let me tell the Paymaster General about the cost of unemployment. Every unemployed man or woman costs the country between £6,300 and £7,000 a year in unemployment, housing and other social security benefits and in lost taxes and national insurance payments.

Unemployment costs the country between £21·5 billion and £24 billion a year. The annual cost of increased unemployment since the Tory Government were elected in 1979 is £14 billion. That is more than the entire revenue from North sea oil. Yet in their perversity the Government choose to spend money on maintaining unemployment rather than on creating jobs. As a result of squandering North sea oil income, the Government have assisted in the destruction of the manufacturing base on which the country relies and which we will need more and more as the years go on.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way, but for the last time, as the time available for the debate has been reduced so much.

Mr. Holt: The right hon. Gentleman has made quite a play with statistics. He has just said that each unemployed person costs the country between £6,300 and £7,000. Two days ago the *Evening Gazette* in Middlesbrough quoted a figure of £5,800 that had been given by the right hon. Gentleman's parliamentary private secretary. Who is correct, the right hon. Gentleman or his PPS?

Mr. Hattersley: If it has to be between my PPS and me, I do not have much doubt about it, particularly since I do not have a PPS, which adds to the mystery. There are two possible sources of error. One is the Middlesbrough *Evening Gazette* and the other is the hon. Gentleman. All I can tell him is that the figures I quoted come from official statistics. The maximum cost of one man or woman unemployed is as high as £7,000 and may be as low as £6,300. Those figures are from the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Overseas Trade. The hon. Gentleman must continue his argument with other people on other occasions.

Having reminded the House of the cost of unemployment and about the result of the destruction of our manufacturing base, may I remind the Chief Secretary of the vital importance of manufacturing industry to the country in the past and of its absolute necessity in future? North sea oil revenues stand between Britain and something very like literal bankruptcy. North sea oil contributes £11 billion to the revenue. The Chief Secretary will not even dare to speculate on what he would do were he £11 billion worse off. Without the £8 million surplus on the oil account, our balance of payments would be in chronic and serious deficit. Although oil provides only 6 per cent. of our national income, we have become wholly and totally dependent on it for economic security. Yet it is a wasting asset and the Government have made neither plans nor preparations for the day when the oil runs out.

Unless manufacturing industry is revived, we shall not be able to fill the balance of payments gap which oil will leave and which it now masks. The service industries cannot do it. Indeed, they do not even claim that they can do it. The time and resources provided by North sea oil should have been used to put Britain back to work and to reinvest in our manufacturing base. But the money has been squandered.

Notwithstanding that, weak-minded Tory Members such as the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk have only one question to ask when we talk about creating jobs, which is, "Where will the money come from?" That is not even the right question. The right question is, "Where is the money going to?" The answer is clear — the Government's obsession with the City and the City's obsession with the money supply have now combined with the Chancellor's constant failure to hit even his monetary targets to provide a new sort of monetarism. The new one, like the old, has had a disastrous effect on our jobs, manufacturing industry and national resources.

The squandering of our national resources, the dissipation of North sea oil revenues, the flight of capital from Britain, and an exchange rate that does not sustain our domestic industry are the price we pay for the Chancellor's medium-term financial strategy. We now want a medium-term employment and industry strategy which makes the reduction of unemployment its first priority; creates the climate in which new manufacturing industry will flourish; invests in public sector capital; promotes education and training; and forges a partnership with the unions and industry. That strategy will not come, perhaps no strategy will come, from this divided and discredited Government. That strategy and the overwhelming primacy of reducing unemployment will come after the next election, from a Labour Government.

4.52 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes that the Government's success in the battle against inflation has already brought with it nearly five years of soundly based economic growth and rising living standards; applauds the achievement of manufacturing industry in raising productivity to record levels; and welcomes the continuing rise in the number of people in work."

I shall have something to say about all three of these elements.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) made some footling fun about the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is not speaking in the debate. It is well known that, in the period shortly before a Budget, the Chancellor does not take part in debates.

I am beginning to wonder how serious the Opposition are about this debate. The only reason for having it is that the right hon. Member is discomfited by the fact that others of his colleagues have been making rather more appearances in the House than he has. Certainly, his colleagues have been plotting and doing their best to prevent him from appearing this afternoon — for what reason, I know not. His speech was heavy on charges, but light on alternative policies.

I happened to hear the right hon. Member on "Desert Island Discs", the one thing I envy him for, because it is an attractive programme. In it, he said that he was basically a happy man and that even after he had had a dreadful failure, he surprised his staff by being happy the following day. I am afraid that his staff will be surprised tomorrow morning, because he has said nothing this afternoon that will give any comfort to the unemployed or lead anybody to believe that his party could deal with unemployment.

It is well known that Treasury Ministers have certain limitations when they take part in a debate when the

[Mr. John MacGregor]

Budget is only a month away. That is when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer traditionally reviews the performance of the economy over the past year and unveils his economic forecast for the year ahead. Traditionally, too, therefore, this is the normal Budget period for Treasury Ministers, so the House will not be expecting me to lift the lid off the Budget box today or to attempt to predict the course of the economy over the coming year. It will, I am sure, understand that I must confine myself to economic performance and policy to date.

Nor will the House expect me to comment on hypothetical future movements in interest and exchange rates. However, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook made much of the dangers when North sea oil runs out, and revenues diminish. When the events of the past three months come to be seen in perspective, perhaps their most striking feature will be the dramatic 40 per cent. fall in the price of oil. With all the dire prognostications of the right hon. Gentleman and others about our dependence on that oil and their warnings about what will happen when the oil runs out and its revenues diminish, one would have expected catastrophe to occur. That would certainly have happened given the state of our economy under his Government and the policies being pursued then.

The world perception of that economy was that our industrial competitiveness was constantly being eroded by inflation rates persistently much higher than all the other major industrial nations. Our industries were bloated by overmanning and crippled by restrictive practices that prevented our embracing modern technology and obtaining the benefits of the efficiency and high quality that they brought. *[Interruption.]* I am not surprised that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) does not want to listen. Other factors that contributed to our problems were restrictive practices that were shored up and perpetuated by Government legislation and intervention and an economy burdened by excessive Government spending, which led to ever increasing overseas debts. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook made much of excessive Government spending today, but it did not lead to higher growth under his Government.

We had an economy in which, alas, the quality and reliability of too many British-made goods, and the failures to deliver on time because of strikes, had become sick overseas jokes. Such a dramatic fall in the oil price as that which we have been experiencing would at that time have led to crisis and another ignominious retreat to the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Does the Chief Secretary agree that part of the reason for the fall in the price of oil is the fact that the Government have no policy towards oil, just as they have no policy for industry? What are the Government's policies towards falling oil prices and production, and to industry? Where are their policies and strategies?

Mr. MacGregor: Oil prices have fallen because they have fallen on international markets. It is not the Government's intention to join OPEC, and we have made that clear. I note from recent letters between the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that it is the Opposition's policy to sustain oil prices at artificially high rates.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): It appears that the Chancellor is incapable of reading letters sent to him. My letters were concerned with talks with OPEC and non-OPEC countries—"talks with" is quite different from joining. If the Minister looks carefully at the correspondence, he will find that the Chancellor's letter sent to me today is absolute rubbish.

Mr. MacGregor: That is absolutely not right, and the House will be able to judge when it sees both letters.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman has made a silly allegation about OPEC. I have the correspondence in front of me. Does he want to withdraw the allegation now or read the letters and withdraw later?

Mr. MacGregor: I have the correspondence in front of me, too. The hon. Lady was clearly arguing for her concern that we should set out an economic strategy in the light of declining oil prices. She was clearly arguing for concern about that fall in oil prices. Perhaps she will confirm whether she wishes to intervene in the current levels of oil prices.

Dr. McDonald: As the right hon. Gentleman has both invited me, and made an absurd allegation, I shall correct him, as I have both the letters in front of me. I do not find any reference in them to joining OPEC. For example, the last paragraph of my letter of 31 January says:

"The Government cannot continue to act in splendid isolation. Untrammelled market forces will damage Britain and the world's economy. You should seize the opportunity of splits in OPEC to open up talks first with OPEC and then with non-OPEC producers on a gradual and controlled fall in oil prices which would also stabilise the exchange rate."

There is nothing there about joining OPEC. It is extremely worrying that we have a Chancellor who is capable neither of reading nor of understanding plain correspondence.

Mr. MacGregor: I am delighted to hear confirmation that the hon. Lady also agrees that we should not join OPEC. It is interesting, in that context, that she is still talking about artificially higher oil prices.

Dr. McDonald *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I will not give way, because this is a short debate and I must get on.

The hon. Lady is talking about a gradual and slow fall in oil prices. The plain fact is that, with the dramatic fall in oil prices which we have seen over recent weeks, there has nevertheless been only a relatively modest adjustment in our exhange rate. The hon. Lady has asked for a gradual and slow fall, so she has been asking for oil prices to be maintained at a higher level. It is extremely interesting, as I have said, that, with the dramatic fall in oil prices, which will have many benefits to our economy, there has been only a relatively modest adjustment in our exchange rate. The fact that that has been so in large part demonstrates the underlying strength of our economy today. It is in stark contrast to the events of 1976 and subsequent years and the then international perception of the state of our economy.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has talked about the destruction of our manufacturing base.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I must move on, because there is a great deal I want to talk about.

It is recognised that we suffered a heavy shake-out in our industries between 1979 and 1981 as we tackled the problems we inherited, to which I have already referred,

and at a time of major world recession caused primarily by the second oil shock. What matters is the progress we have made since then. It reveals a picture very different from the statistics which the Leader of the Opposition used the other day. Having weathered that major world recession, our economy has been growing steadily for the past four and a half years. No stop-go here. It has been the longest period of sustained growth for many years. That is very much in manufacturing industry's interests. When figures for 1985 as a whole are published, they will show that we have grown not only faster than all other Community countries but faster than the United States too. Investment has increased at 4 per cent. a year and is now standing at an all-time high.

Mr. Straw *rose——*

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman does not want to hear.

In the past five years, manufacturing productivity has been rising by a historically powerful 6 per cent. a year on average. Industrial rates of return are the highest for two decades—three times higher than in 1975. The current account of the balance of payments has been in surplus for six successive years and non-oil exports rose by almost 8 per cent. in 1985 to reach record levels for the second year running. That is rebuilding the industrial base which had declined in the 1970s.

Mr. Hattersley *rose——*

Mr. MacGregor: We have a short debate and I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman wants others to get in.

Underlying all that improvement, and of overriding importance, has been our considerable success in slashing the rate of inflation from an average of over 15 per cent., under the Government of which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was a member, to a third of that figure, on average, since the 1983 election. I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman did not refer to inflation at all, although it is of great importance to all manufacturing industry and to rebuilding the industrial base.

All the vague policies which the right hon. Gentleman talked about would undoubtedly have increased the rate of inflation considerably. It is noticeable that the highest rate of inflation recorded since the 1983 election is still lower than any rate achieved when the Labour party was last in power. It is that record on inflation which provides a much more stable base for industry to look ahead with confidence. Living standards have reflected that performance, rising by 13 per cent. in real terms since 1979 for a married man with two children on average earnings, compared with a paltry growth of 0·5 per cent. between 1974 and 1979.

I shall tackle a little further the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook's charge on manufacturing performance and productivity in recent years. Manufacturing output under the Labour Government declined by 3 per cent. I have already made the case for the problems of the recession in 1981—we are now talking about a four-year period. Manufacturing output has increased under the Government by 10 per cent. Manufacturing investment under the right hon. Gentleman's Government increased by 6 per cent. Since 1981 it has increased by 19 per cent. and it is on a rising trend.

It is true that the trend on manufacturing imports is more comparable—43 per cent. under the right hon. Gentleman's Government and 48 per cent. since 1981. That tendency for manufacturing imports to increase is shared by all western industrialised countries. It reflects many factors—not least the adjustment which has had to be made to our balance of payments as a result of the increased production of North sea oil. But fundamental to it must be the fact that consumers in the exercise of their own free choice frequently opt for foreign products, for a whole variety of reasons including quality, design, innovation and so on as well as price; and that companies, after scouring the market, choose foreign capital goods very frequently for their investment in order themselves to remain competitive or even to survive, for the same reasons.

The answer to that must simply be for British firms to improve the attractiveness of their products in the market place on all those counts. In other words, it is the customer who chooses. I note that, in the many reams of words containing Labour party pronouncements on general policy in the past year, there is much about Government intervention and planning, national investment banks and huge increases in Government spending—all the old tried and failed remedies. There has not been a word about the customer and the key fact that products sell only if they best meet his needs. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, there has been one reference in a recent speech.

I believe that our underlying improvement is perhaps best shown in the fact that manufacturing productivity has been growing at three times the rate which the economy displayed under the Opposition. It is important to look at that rate of improvement of productivity. I shall look at that aspect because it is vital, to understanding not only the present difficulties of unemployment but how they will be tackled in the future.

The reason is not hard to find. During the 1970s, in public and private sector alike, we had huge overmanning in terms of units of production in relation to most other western countries, and management either did not dare or was prevented from tackling it. That was clearly unsustainable. Unit labour costs doubled in the second half of the 1970s, so our competitiveness declined. It is little wonder that the rates of return in manufacturing industry were abysmally low and falling against our competitors. Thus, much of the rise in unemployment which we have seen during the 1980s, far from being the consequence of this Government's economic policies, reflects the inability or failure, for whatever reason, of some industries—I am certainly not casting all the blame on them—to tackle those problems in the past, and the refusal of the previous Labour Government to assist them in the task.

Anyone who has visited industrial companies on any scale in the last few years will have seen for himself countless examples of how these problems are now being tackled. Technology is being embraced enthusiastically and we are becoming efficient again. It is happening in the public sector too. In 1979 the British Steel Corporation produced only 131 tonnes of crude steel per employee, 94 tonnes less than West Germany and 170 tonnes less than Italy. In 1984, with a work force one third of the size, they were producing 243 tonnes of steel per employee, closing the gap between them and Italy by more than half and within 10 tonnes of West Germany. At British Airways between 1978-79 and 1984-85, the labour force also fell by a third while productivity rose by a dramatic 57 per cent.

[Mr. MacGregor]

In the coal industry during the last couple of months, the record production rate has been broken five times. Projected sales are likely to approach pre-strike levels in the current financial year, yet the industry now has 24 fewer pits and 33,000 fewer men than at the end of the strike. That impressive improvement in productivity—which has been needed across British industry—with manpower down by nearly a fifth, has been achieved without any compulsory redundancies.

Now, pretty well bringing up the end of the line, much-needed change is coming to that last bastion of old-fashioned practices, Fleet street. Everyone knows that overmanning, demarcation disputes and resistance to technological change in the national newspaper industry have been an acknowledged scandal for years. Now that the move to Wapping has taken place, Bernard Levin, in a "now at last it can be exposed" article in *The Times* last week, revealed it all. To cite just one example that he gave—in New York and Sydney it takes six men to work the same printing press that in London, until News International's move to Wapping, used three times that number. That was not creating real employment or keeping up jobs—it was keeping men on a payroll for doing nothing, resisting change, creating gross inefficiencies and losses and eventually destroying firms. It was possible that, as a consequence, work would go abroad.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister has revealed a catalogue of industries where the sacking of staff has apparently resulted in greater efficiency. He did not mention the enormous cost of paying dole to those former employees or the cost of any redundancy pay, if they were lucky enough to get it.

Why has that message not got through to No. 10 Downing street? The cost of running No. 10 under a Labour Prime Minister was £1·2 million, while the latest figure is £3·8 million. Why has there been no rationalisation at No. 10, where expenditure has risen by more than 200 per cent.?

Mr. MacGregor: That demonstrates the pointlessness of giving way.

Roger Eglin, writing in the same newspaper issue in *The Sunday Times*, put it well. He said:

"in a free, competitive society technology is irresistible. Someone will introduce it, even if you resist. Technology does mean that jobs go. The fact that this is only in the short-term and that on the evidence of the American newspaper industry more jobs, and better prosperity, are created in the long-term is not much comfort for those on the receiving end."

I understand that. He continued:

"The inevitability of this change is essentially the most basic reason for co-operating with technology."

That gets it right—*[Interruption.]* These changes have taken place during the past few weeks.

Of course it is painful in the short-term, of course it sometimes creates short-term unemployment—but these sweeping moves to higher productivity and to accepting new technologies that require many fewer people to work them undoubtedly strengthen our economy and must, in the long run, be right for jobs. The Opposition clearly do not understand that.

The same goes for the need for industrial restructuring, of which the west midlands is now the classic example. It has had to take place on a shorter time scale than we would have wished if only it had been tackled earlier. On both those issues, the speed and the scale of adjustment has had to sharpen because the task was shirked earlier, so the effect on individuals has been greater. In my judgment, it had to be faced. Of course it means higher current unemployment, but the fact that we are facing these problems should not be the cause for the criticism of which the Opposition are making so much today. The criticism is that we, as a nation, did not tackle them in good time before.

It is because of the underlying strength of the economy to which I referred and because we are facing up to modernisation that the overseas perception of our economy is so positively different today. That is why the OECD, in its latest economic survey, was able to comment:

"the recovery . . . has now continued for longer than any other post war recovery . . . profitability has recovered. Both investments and exports have been strong. Employment has picked up rapidly since 1983. The economy has survived a 1 year miners' strike without any major disruption to output elsewhere. And the balance of payments has remained in surplus. Thus in many respects the economic performance has been good."

That is the background. We are building the strength of the economy for the future—something on which jobs will depend.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred to employment measures, and I wish to deal with them. I shall leave aside the question of public sector capital spending, because we are shortly to have a debate on our White Paper on Government expenditure, and I can deal adequately with that question then.

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman owes it to the House to explain why, virtually alone among all the bodies commenting on these matters, the Government reject the concept of public investment to reduce unemployment. It is no good his talking about industries where the number of jobs will be reduced. He should be telling us why, for example, the Government will not increase housebuilding and put building employees back to work. What is the reason for that?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall deal with those matters during our public expenditure debate, when I will have time to do so in detail. We have, in fact, expanded road programmes with capital investment up by 20 per cent. in real terms since 1979. This year's public expenditure White Paper increased the housing renovation programme over last year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I do not want to take too long. These matters will best be dealt with in a full day's debate on the public expenditure White Paper, when I shall happily tackle the right hon. Gentleman on these matters.

The right hon. Gentleman made much of his cost of employment approach. Even accepting his figures, which I do not, that sort of extrapolation is absurd. Is he suggesting that unemployment will fall to zero almost overnight, or even in the comparatively near future? That was what he implied, and that is what will be needed to make sense of his figures. However, he knows that that will not happen. After all, he said in his speech to the London Business School last month:

"The need to encourage manufacturing has to be put into its proper perspective. I do not for a moment claim that it will directly have a massive effect on the level of unemployment."

He has tried to imply differently today.

If it were so easy, where were the tax cuts under the last Labour Government, who, on the right hon. Gentleman's analysis, also wasted large sums of money on

unemployment? Why, by his simply remedy, did not unemployment come down rather than double under his Government? Of course, income tax rates also rose.

Much more seriously, the right hon. Gentleman is engaged in the biggest conjuring trick of all time. He cannot bandy about those figures without saying how the real jobs will miraculously be conjured up. How will he set about creating gainful employment for all those people in the market place, without Government subsidy, on which his remedy would depend?

The truth is that a great surge in spending is in the right hon. Gentleman's mind, as he has made clear, because that is his way of getting more jobs. The consequent surge in interest rates and inflation, and the devastating effect of that on the real productive industries of the economy, seem not to be in his mind. He takes no account of the many existing jobs that would be destroyed in his attempt to square the circle.

I had intended to comment at some length on the policies we have been pursuing on employment, training and job creation measures. However, I shall leave that to my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General, whose responsibility it is.

One of the right hon. Gentleman's proposals is clearly absurd. As it is an Opposition Supply day debate, it is not unreasonable to ask how the Opposition's economic policies measure up to the present position, and what they would do about employment. I carefully noted what he put forward as his policies — they were all words and strategy, with absolutely nothing specific.

I shall start with privatisation. It is only fair to give the right hon. Gentleman an opportunity to clarify the Opposition's position, since my right hon. Friend the Chancellor asked him a number of questions the last time that we debated the economy. In particular, he asked which of the privatised companies would be taken back into public ownership, and on what terms. The right hon. Gentleman responded with deafening silence and not a little squirming embarrassment.

Of course, we had an answer in part from the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition who has now left the Chamber. He said, first, on the radio a few weekends ago:

"the use of budgets for re-nationalisation are going to have to take their place in a pretty long queue."

So far so good, although I note that a number of his colleagues have already been putting in the knife on that proposition.

The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that, where industries were taken back into public ownership, shares would be bought back from the institutions at the original selling price. As the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook knows, the vast majority of institutional funds are held on behalf of pensioners and small investors who have invested their lifetime savings in life policies. Perhaps he has forgotten to tell his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, because the policies that his right hon. Friend announced would amount to a severe attack on the pensions and savings of millions of people. I hope that he will come clean and tell those millions of pensioners and potential pensioners which industries he proposes to take into public ownership, and when. No wonder the right hon. Gentleman is squirming with embarrassment.

Secondly, what will the terms be? It is the savings of those people that are at stake. It would be invidious to pick them out for that cruel and inequitable treatment. The right hon. Gentleman is slow to get on his feet on that point.

However, I have some sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman. Every time that he develops a plausible sounding policy, his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition takes it apart for him shortly afterwards. The Leader of the Opposition was up to his tricks again at the weekend. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was glued to his screen on Sunday lunchtime to discover what his taxation strategy was. Gone are the plans to increase taxation on the "bloody rich", whom the right hon. Gentleman has defined as families earning more than £20,000 a year. It appears now that there are two commitments, with which the right hon. Gentleman will find it exceedingly difficult to live.

According to the television interview given by the Leader of the Opposition, there will be swingeing increases on the 4 or 5 per cent. of the population who earn more than £30,000 a year. That has also been said this afternoon. Taxation would be up to almost 100 per cent. There was the clearest of hints that there would be no increase in the basic rate. Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that there will be no increase in the basic rate?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course.

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman says, "Of course." That leaves a gaping hole in the taxation strategy. While we have heard much about broad approaches—we have heard about them again this afternoon—there has been deafening silence on some economic policies. The Opposition's public spending commitments are much more specific. It is difficult to keep track of each one, but we are doing our best. We are costing them as fast as we can. I notice how nervous the hon. Member for Thurrock is becoming. We are costing them even at the risk of overheating our calculators. The figure is enormous. Leaving out one-off promises and pledges on renationalisation, and considering only the cost of continuing commitments, the total amounts to £24 billion.

If the sad day ever dawns when the right hon. Gentleman sits on the Government Benches, he will be forced to trim, but that is the extent of the bribe that he is currently offering to the British people. How does the right hon. Gentleman propose to finance that massive increase in spending?

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Too long.

Mr. MacGregor: No wonder the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) does not want to listen either.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry; will my hon. Friend allow me to finish?

If there were such a crippling tax on higher incomes, it is unlikely that any but a few would continue to see the point in earning more than £30,000 a year, so the yield would come tumbling down. Even on the absurd assumption that everyone above that level continued to earn those sums—working for the Government in effect—the yield would be far short of what the Leader of the

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Opposition and the right hon. Gentleman believe. It would be only a minuscule proportion of the total extra public spending to which they are committed.

The right hon. Gentleman has just told us that there would be no increase in basic rate, so where would the money come from? If he chose to finance the programme through value added tax, he would need an increase of 26 percentage points, taking the rate to 41 per cent. The effect on pensioners and those on low incomes would be colossal and the effect on inflation would be likewise. Yet it was the right hon. Gentleman who said:

"in terms of promoting employment opportunities throughout the country . . .nothing is more important than containing inflation."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 1978; Vol. 943, c. 1271.]

How does he square that policy? How will he create the money to finance his public spending plans? What impact would that have on jobs? No wonder the right hon. Gentleman, in his manifesto for the Labour party leadership, analysed his party's catastrophic failure at the previous general election in the following terms:

"We failed because we made promises which many of our potential supporters believed we could not keep."

Our record compared with that of the right hon. Gentleman's party, our respective policies and the credibility of our policies give me every confidence in asking the House to reject the Opposition's motion and to support the Government's amendment. I note the total silence on the Opposition Benches.

5.24 pm

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): I accept the Chief Secretary's argument about productivity and efficiency. There is no future for the nation in overmanning or maintaining inefficient and out-of-date working methods. It often strikes me how regularly the Labour party appears to argue for the continuance of those trends, but I am sure that the House recognises that there is no future in that approach.

The Chief Secretary's speech was interesting and I give him credit for defending the Government's position with some vigour. However, his speech revolved round a selective use of statistics. It is no good telling us how marvellous the improvement has been since 1981 when the Government have been in charge of the economy since 1979. Statistics can be useful, but their usefulness depends on where one starts from. The Government cannot defend their record merely on the basis of what has happened since 1981.

Even on the Government's criteria, I do not believe that the position is anything like as good as they would have us believe. I give the Minister and the Cabinet some credit. The Government have constantly alluded to their fight against inflation. That has been a regular theme during the past six years. But progress has not been as impressive as the Government would have us believe. The United Kingdom inflation rate is about 5·7 per cent. The figures of our major competitors are less, with one exception. The United States has an inflation rate of 3·8 per cent., Switzerland has 3·2 per cent., Japan 1·8 per cent., Holland 0·9 per cent., West Germany 1·3 per cent. and even Socialist France has a lower rate, at 4·7 per cent. Our only significant industrial competitor with a higher level of inflation is Italy at 8·6 per cent.

The depreciation of the pound that has occurred worsens those statistics, even though it may assist others. On the major index on which the Government wish to be judged, progress is significant, but is nothing like as strong as the Minister would have us believe. The cause of that is shown by statistics on earnings that come easily to hand.

The weakness of the approach of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was that he did not mention earnings from one end of his speech to the other. We are all aware of the impact of earnings. Average earnings in Britain are rising by about 8·6 per cent. Among our competitors, they are rising by 3·1 per cent. in the United States, 3 per cent. in Switzerland, 3·8 per cent. in Japan, 1·9 per cent. in Holland, 3·2 per cent. in West Germany and 6 per cent. in France. Those increases are significantly less than that in Britain.

The Chief Secretary knows that the reality is worse than the figure of 8·6 per cent. Pay settlements in the manufacturing sector, which must succeed in competing against countries wishing to sell to us and against other industries wishing to sell abroad, are higher than the average figure. That is compensated in part by the vigorous way in which the Government have kept down pay settlements in the Government sector—a broad and general definition. Pay settlements in the manufacturing sector, where they count most, have been higher.

In broad-sweep terms, the Government will not be able to hold their position during the next three, four and five years. Their argument about teachers and the erosion of their pay relative to people with similar responsibilities and skills in the manufacturing sector cannot be sustained. One wilts at the thought that a 10 per cent. rise for Government employees would cost about £4 billion, which I suspect would exceed the extra tax that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook hopes to get from those earning over £30,000 a year.

Pressure is welling up and the next Government will have to deal with it. I doubt whether even this Government, with all their determination, will succeed in keeping the lid on that pressure until the next general election. If they do succeed, a good few Conservative Members will be looking for alternative employment after the election, as the anger of their constituents is expressed in the only way available to them.

So far, I have examined two criteria and both suggest that the position is worse than the Government claim.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is not the reality that teachers' pay has kept up with inflation, but has not kept up with pay awards elsewhere in industry? As a nation, we are still pricing ourselves out of jobs by paying ourselves more than we earn. That is the pressure which is making us less competitive. What would the alliance do about that?

Mr. Penhaligon: I will not duck that issue. Our solution is not an easy one, but we believe that it would work. I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. He confirms that teachers, who are important to our economy, are in a worse position than those with similar skills in the manufacturing sector. I do not wish to argue about teachers' pay today. I mention it merely as an illustration of the pressure—sometimes venom—that is building up.

We used to be told that if we controlled the money supply everything would fall neatly into place. That was the message that the Conservatives gave to the British people in 1979 and that message got them elected.

The narrow definition of money, M1, is increasing in this country at the astronomical rate of 17·4 per cent. The broad definition is increasing at a rate of 13·6 per cent. On the narrow definition, we have a higher increase in money supply than any country with which we are roughly comparable. On the broad definition, our rate of increase is second only to that of Australia.

If the Minister who is to reply can find time to answer only one question, I hope that it will be the one that I am about to ask. Do the Government still believe that controlling the money supply will solve the inflationary pressures in our society? If so, do they believe that current difficulties have been caused because they have not succeeded in controlling the money supply? Or do they believe that the money supply does not control those matters? It must be one or the other. Whichever it is, one must ask what controls these difficulties if the money supply does not.

On the three-month money market, United Kingdom interest rates are just over 13 per cent. Rates in other countries are 7·5 per cent. in the United States, 4 per cent. in Switzerland, 6 per cent. in Japan, 5 per cent. in Holland, 4·5 per cent. in West Germany, and 9 per cent. in France. Again, Italy is the only country with a higher rate.

The Government's policy in the past couple of months has been to increase interest rates even more, to defend the pound because of the reduction in oil prices. That has worked to an extent, though the increase has been a shade less than I thought that the Government would introduce. The strategy since 1979 has been high interest rates and high exchange rates, with oil taking the strain. That has led to 3·4 million unemployed. The only OECD country with a higher rate of unemployment is Holland, and unemployment is falling there, but is still increasing here.

How can we manage to get unemployment on to a downward trend while maintaining and increasing our manufacturing sector? It is not a simple task, and the only alternative to the Government's policy is a form of pay strategy. It is easy for the Labour Opposition to be irresponsible and to pretend that such a strategy is not the pill which must be swallowed if we wish to do something about unemployment.

The alliance believes firmly that without some form of pay strategy, which will reduce settlements in the manufacturing sector, no sustainable reduction in unemployment can be achieved. Indeed, without something being done about pay settlements, on a three-year or four-year basis, we shall see a further escalation of the current tragedy.

The alliance may lose support because of its policy, but we shall be explaining honestly between now and the next election how a restrictive pay strategy, including elements such as profit-sharing, represents the only real alternative to the Government's approach. I accept that the Government will not introduce such a strategy and that their mandate was not to do that.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The hon. Gentleman spoke earlier about teachers and other groups and referred to a potential explosion. What would the Liberal party do about that problem? Would it rat on its promises to teachers?

Mr. Penhaligon: No. We believe that the incoming Government will have to make an adjustment — an expensive and painful adjustment—for many people in the Government sector to give them a little justice in their lives. It will not be as much as they desire, but we recognise that it will have to be done and when we put forward our Budget, hon. Members will see how that is incorporated.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): How much will it cost?

Mr. Penhaligon: I said that a 10 per cent. increase across the board would cost £4 billion. We could leave out the forces, the police and the fire service, but 10 per cent. across the board would be a very large sum and I am not trying to duck that question.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling) *rose*——

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South) *rose*——

Mr. Penhaligon: I have given way quite a lot already. This is a short debate and we ought to get on. I have a feeling that we shall be having many such debates in the next few months when we can explore the matters.

The alliance believes that there is a role for investment, even within the current strategy, in a number of infrastructure projects that could help to relieve unemployment. We agree with the Chief Secretary that the room for flexibility is limited. Given that my party's determination is not to continue asset sales after the election, when we are in government our room for manoeuvre will be even less. However, the Government could afford to run the public sector borrowing requirement at a higher rate and to invest to save jobs.

If the Chancellor of the Exchequer concludes, as I suspect that he will, that there is some room for tax cuts this year, if not as much as he was hoping for four or five months ago, that money must be directed to the lower paid and to job creation. The alliance and many Conservative Members believe that if the Government have a little money, it should be given to the lower paid, who have been worst affected by income tax changes under this Government, or to job creation. I hope that the Chief Secretary will tell the Chancellor of the Exchequer that that view is shared by many Conservative Members, particularly those representing areas where unemployment has reached the tragic level of 25 per cent. which exists in some parts of my county.

We shall support the Opposition's motion and we shall vote against the Government's amendment. Unfortunately, the motion does not say what the Opposition would do to tackle the problems. It is strong on diagnosis and weak on content. The Minister cannot say that the Liberal party has not acknowledged that a difficult pill has to be swallowed if we are to return the 3·4 million unemployed to work.

5.41 pm

Mr. Francis Pym (Cambridgeshire, South-East): The only point that I would concede to the Opposition this afternoon is their choice of subject. Government economic policy and the level of unemployment is one of the most important issues facing our country today. I find the

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Opposition's attitude to unemployment acceptable in terms of their concern about the experience of it and their dislike of it, but totally unimpressive in terms of solutions. They have offered us no solutions of any kind today.

I have some sympathy with the views of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the cost of unemployment. In July 1985 I had considerable correspondence with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on this aspect on behalf of my Conservative Centre Forward colleagues. I cannot say that we achieved a meeting of minds.

This afternoon my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary made some very important comments about the cost of unemployment, and it is one aspect that we cannot dismiss. The huge cost of leaving all these human resources idle is very great and must be taken into account. This afternoon I urge my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to adopt an altogether more far-reaching, comprehensive and imaginative strategy to tackle the gigantic problem of unemployment.

My right hon. Friends have expressed their worry and anxiety about unemployment, but I do not think that their actions have yet matched their rhetoric. They have not acknowledged the magnitude of the problem, nor recognised its nature. To understand the unfairness of unemployment and the denial of freedom which it represents; to understand that it is individual people and not the nation as a whole that suffers it—after all, more than 80 per cent. of us are doing all right thank you very much; to understand the scale and the value of the human resources that are being wasted by unemployment—to understand all this is to create the motivation and inspiration to take commensurate action.

I differ from almost all of my hon. Friends and from politicians of all parties in my assessment of the future of employment and the effect that the technological revolution will have. I find that my views are very close to a great many in industry and commerce. None of us can peer into the future and predict events with any accuracy, but we can use our experience to detect trends, see new opportunities emerging, and warn of the dangers ahead.

Even if my assessment of rising unemployment as a result of present policies is only half right, that does not mean that there is nothing we can do to alleviate the problem or take an entirely fresh look at the future of work. What I am clear about, and have been for several years, is that the present situation is unacceptable. We can do more about it.

I see the technological revolution as a marvellous opportunity and unlike anything that has happened before. Unlike the industrial revolution, it can actually take the drudgery out of work. It can make possible a very different kind of life. The social changes it will bring are almost too enormous to grasp, but grasped they must be, and prepared for.

I shall come later to the measures that I would like to see taken at once—indeed, measures that I should have liked to have seen taken several years ago. Those measures can be taken appropriately only in the context of a long-term overall strategy that deals with the real heart and nature of the problem, which is that the number of man-hours needed to produce what we can sell and what we need is reducing at an accelerating rate.

In the past century, the average number of man-hours per annum in manufacturing industry has declined from 154,000 for a working lifetime to 88,000. In the past 15 years the fall in average man-hours has been 10 per cent. In those same 15 years economic growth has been 22 per cent., and there has been a sustained rise in service industries, yet total employment has dropped by 10 per cent.

My right hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench ask us to accept that an adherence to their economic policy will somehow put everyone back to work in due course. There have been many gains in terms of inflation, productivity and improvements in industrial relations legislation, for example, but in terms of curing unemployment the policy has not worked. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's last Budget was entitled a Budget for jobs. Look what happened. In military language, the intelligence and appreciation have been inadequate.

Before coming to the United Kingdom dimension of a problem that is worldwide, I shall remind the House of the international background. None of us can go it alone now. We are all interdependent, so international co-operation is essential. Unfortunately, there is too little of it at present. Domestic political pressures bear so heavily on Governments—all Governments—that international co-operation is not accorded the top priority that it should have.

The mutual problems that the world faces today are serious enough to contain at least the seeds of a possible collapse of the monetary system. These problems include the scale of indebtedness and the huge interest payments that they attract, the United States deficit, the instability of exchange rates, the threat of protectionism, and the lack of co-ordinated trade policies. Our Government are trying to tackle all these problems, and so are others, but the will to co-operate does not yet exist widely enough or strongly enough to produce the required results. I think the truth of this may emerge in due course.

One local example is the sluggishness of the development of the European Community. The most obvious area for a concerted initiative is unemployment, but it has not happened so far.

The limits imposed upon nation states by this lack of effective international co-operation, and the opportunities missed as a result of it, are considerable. I urge the Government to redouble their efforts in this direction. I know my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is making them, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to do so, too, with her standing and authority within the international community.

I come now to the strategy that I would like to see pursued. It is essentially long term, because there are no quick or easy answers, the causes of unemployment being far too deep-seated for that, but some elements of the strategy would have a beneficial effect in the near term, and amongst these I would include the first element, which is the commitment to growth and the creation of wealth, which is the commitment of Her Majesty's Government.

There is no doubt that there are some favourable and hopeful aspects of our economy, and we have a restoration of a growth path, but what is needed is a gradual but sustained increase in demand—not in consumption, but in exports. The vital need is to regenerate our manufacturing industry and improve our competitiveness. That is the only way to secure the share of world markets

that we need, and to achieve higher growth without inflation and a balance of payments problem. Competitiveness is the key word, and that means more investment in productive industry and a deliberate policy of cutting industrial costs.

In practice, competitiveness means shedding more labour and installing more technology, and in that sense it exacerbates unemployment. However, growth and wealth creation are indispensable for any recovery from unemployment.

The second element of the strategy is a more positive industrial policy. The Government spurn any thought of this as some sort of heresy. To them, the phrase "industrial policy" means some sort of sacrilege and an approach to the dreaded consensus. If that were to mean beer and sandwiches at No. 10, I agree that it would be the ultimate absurdity, but I do not mean that.

The role that I see for the Government is not an interfering one, and certainly not an operational one. I see them as having a supportive and co-ordinating role. In the world at large, nothing remotely like a free market exists. All Governments dole out subsidies to all sorts of industries, with the result that there is not genuine competition. It is only my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench who can provide a response to unfair foreign competition.

I suspect that if a firm and sensible relationship existed between the Government and industry, we could have secured the recent United States defence contract that went to France. The French Government were deeply involved in the task of obtaining that order from the outset. There is a clear lesson for us there.

The third element is an altogether more substantial and sophisticated regional policy. National statistics are a bad guide to the differing needs of different regions and I consider them to be positively misleading. I shall divide the regions into two categories for the sake of brevity, but the variations between them are more subtle than that and need consideration on their own merits. The simple division is the one between declining regions and expanding regions, in which needs are very different.

In the declining regions, there is a need to revive and stimulate new activity to the maximum possible extent, and the Government have taken many measures to that end. The most recent measure is the inner-city programme, but there have been numerous others. I support and endorse all these programmes. However, my view remains that the Government would have been wiser to listen to the warnings that some of us were giving a few years ago and to act more positively at an earlier stage.

Money is not the only criterion. Indeed, it is perhaps not even mainly a question of money. Organisation and imagination are required. We have not measured up to the deprivation that has been experienced in the declining regions. We have justified it to ourselves, but I do not think that we have acted with understanding or with the action that is required in the light of the experience of those who live in the regions concerned. I hope that we shall stop doing too little too late and get ahead of the problems.

The needs of the expanding regions are entirely different from the regions which are in decline. The expansion is coming in the south and in East Anglia because of the dominance of the European market. Huge opportunities exist in these regions and as a nation I do not think that we are thinking hard enough about taking full advantage of them. In these regions expansion raises many difficulties and Cambridgeshire is an example. In Cambridgeshire, we have what is called the Cambridge phenomenon, which means that the expansion of the technologically based industries—the process has been continuing for more than 50 years—has reached the point at which the limits of the capacity of the local infrastructure have been reached. No such limits existed in earlier times because the extra infrastructure could be constructed immediately. No such limits existed when, for example, Liverpool was building itself into the great city that it was and is. There, as elsewhere, every opportunity was grasped and building went ahead.

There are constraints to such development nowadays, and environmental and planning constraints are two examples. These constraints attract the support of virtually everyone. Let us realise the straitjacket to enterprise that these constraints impose. The local authorities of Cambridgeshire are working hard to ascertain how and where to extend development. They are doing the best that they can, but, in addition to all the local considerations that are being given to these issues throughout the country, there needs to be regional and national consideration. We should be working to an intellectually coherent pattern, and I do not think that that exists currently.

At present, we have a mis-match of resources between the declining and expanding regions and we must have a policy that is designed to correct it over a period. That means that it must encompass the mobility of labour. There are many reasons why labour is far more immobile today than it was in the 1930s. Indeed, there are far too many reasons to mention. It must be in our national interest to make it easier for people to move if they wish to do so, especially from the declining to the expanding regions.

Mr. Marlow: Does my right hon. Friend subscribe to the view that we should boost private sector rented accommodation?

Mr. Pym: Yes, I do. It will be necessary to do that. It was easier for people to move from one area to another in the 1930s because they were able to rent a room or a flat. I accept that they could be turned out very quickly, but there was scope to move that does not exist now. Another part of the problem that must be considered is the cost of moving and the difficulty that people have in meeting it. I do not see anyone in the Government or elsewhere thinking about these issues. We need to ensure that we consider them and introduce a programme that begins to tackle them.

Mr. Holt: My right hon. Friend has said that no one is thinking about the problems associated with mobility. May I draw his attention to the *Northern Echo* of last Saturday. If he reads it, he will see that my initiative of a job link between that newspaper and the *Buxton Press* has resulted in yet another person finding a job, leaving the dole in the north and travelling to the prosperous south along the lines that my right hon Friend has set out. Unfortunately, the Government are just not interested.

Mr. Pym: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. He has corrected me, and quite rightly. The point is that no one is thinking of these problems nationally. I accept that there is concern regionally, but there is no collecting of views and no co-ordinating of them. There is no input from the centre as far as I can see.

[Mr. Pym]

The fourth element is a larger programme of public works than we have now that concentrates on capital expenditure, especially housing. I do not accept that this need be inflationary. I know that some of my hon. Friends think that the slightest increase in anything will be inflationary. We know from our experience from the Falkland Islands and the miners' strike that that is not true. We must remember the enormous spare capacity that 3 million to 4 million unemployed represents. The least that we can do is provide activity for a few of the millions of individuals who are affected by unemployment, who need better housing, a better life and some hope.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I find some difficulty in squaring my right hon. Friend's belief that we should channel more capital spending, presumably into public housing in the so-called declining regions, rather than taking legislative steps to improve the supply of private rented accommodation in the expanding regions to which he has referred. I agree with almost everything else that he has said.

Mr. Pym: My hon. Friend may disagree with me about that and may consider that any public investment is not right. I do not share that view. I think that there is scope for the development of both private and public sectors.

The four elements of the strategy that I submitted to the House would have, in my view, a valuable effect on unemployment in the short term, although I would not exaggerate it, and would certainly have a valuable effect in the long term. Other elements must be added if the strategy is to be complete and effective. I shall mention them only briefly now, but they are all important.

On education, there is an obvious need for training and retraining for industry and commerce and for the raising of education standards generally. The worst indictment of our education and training programmes is that we are already short of skilled labour before a major recovery has occurred. That is an indispensable resource which we can and must expand if we are ever to achieve the adequate growth that I am sure the House wants.

There is also the long term issue of preparing our children for a life which, for many of them, will mean more leisure than any previous generation has known. If they are not prepared for it, they will be unable to enjoy it. What a waste that would be. I regard higher education and research as crucially important to our future, and I should like our policy to be reversed. We need to capitalise on our successes and to develop our universities and research centres into something that is even better than what we have now. The present policy of starving them and squeezing them is short sighted. We are the best inventors in the world, and we have some claim to be the best educators in the world. We must remain at the top of that league.

As the House knows, I believe that there should be a much more radical and far-reaching reform of the social welfare system. I spoke recently about this, so I shall mention only the two most basic needs of the new system. First, there must be a permanent incentive to work—that is, an end to the poverty trap and an end to the "Why work?" syndrome. Secondly, poverty must be prevented, so far as that can be achieved. I put forward my views in the House about a month ago. I have also made them known outside Parliament.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): My right hon. Friend has referred to putting an end to the poverty trap and to the "Why work?" syndrome, but he referred earlier in his speech to the need to spend more public money. However, we are creating unemployment. We are taxing people so heavily at the lower end of the scale that many of them are giving up work because they are better off if they draw unemployment benefit.

Mr. Pym: It is precisely that absurdity that it is so important to end. I put forward my views to the House on another occasion about how that might be achieved. The ending of the poverty trap and, so far as is possible, the prevention of poverty are essential ingredients in any strategy to deal with unemployment.

There is also the important question of the distribution of employment. The Government have a job sharing scheme and they are absolutely right to encourage it, but this whole new subject deserves much deeper study. I should like the public to be more involved in the discussions about a shorter working week, early voluntary retirement and sabbaticals on a weekly, daily or monthly basis. Of course that would affect incomes. That is part of the problem. But I do not believe that the British people will ever feel comfortable if most of us are occupied all our lives and doing all right while a substantial minority are having a pretty miserable and unsatisfying life. We need to redefine the word "employment". We also need to redefine unemployment and even work itself. Such an open debate and discussion can only help people to understand what is happening and will happen in our society.

Finally, I shall mention a point that some hon. Members may feel is too marginal to mention, but which I feel is important. I dislike intensely the tendency towards centralisation. I should like there to be a revival of provincialism. We need to revive and nurture the feelings of local pride as well as the feelings of patriotism. They go together. They are complementary. Everybody understands that many major decisions have to be taken nationally, but let all the decisions that can be taken locally be taken locally. That is a basic conservative principle. It enriches the tapestry of the nation and it is in accord with people's aspirations. In its own limited way I believe that it would help people, especially in the declining regions, in their battle against unemployment and the deprivation that that implies.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): How will the right hon. Gentleman be voting tonight?

Mr. Pym: I shall be voting in support of my Government. I am urging my right hon. Friends to go a great deal further than they have gone so far. The Opposition have suggested nothing for which anybody could conceivably vote.

This strategy would cost money. I said on an earlier occasion in this House that it should be paid for out of the proceeds of privatisation. To use those proceeds in this way would not only be understood by everyone; it would be very acceptable to everyone as a reinvestment of national assets to help the unemployed. It would also mean an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement but, as I have said before, I do not accept that that need be inflationary. The money must be spent on productive investment, not on consumption. This strategy also means

that I do not believe that a cut in personal tax rates is the right or the best use of available resources in the coming Budget.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pym: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not do so. I have come almost to the end of my speech.

However, it is right—and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will do this—to adjust tax allowances and to raise tax thresholds so that at the lower end of the scale some benefit is achieved.

I apologise for keeping the House for so long. I regard the present unemployment problem and the future of employment as one of the greatest challenges of our time. That challenge can be met only by a strategy that is comprehensive, coherent and complete. That is what I have sought to outline today to the House.

6.6 pm

Mr. Sean Hughes (Knowsley, South): I agree with the right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) that unemployment is one of the greatest problems that affects us today.

Last weekend the word appeared to go out from the Government that their economic policies have a humane face to them, after all. However, there is no evidence to back up that assertion. I listened to those speeches with the same incredulity as I listened to the speeches of Conservative Members who say that the Opposition have no monopoly of conscience. However, for sheer effrontery the speech last November of the chairman of the Conservative party takes some beating. In his Disraeli lecture he said:

"I know that at the front of that campaign for a return to traditional values of decency and order will be the Conservative Party."

Does he indeed? After seven years of this Government's policies, a Government of which he, more than most, is the epitome, it is those values that are most at risk. Time after time in speech after speech we have listened to the litany of the misery arising from mass unemployment, but apparently the Government have been unmoved. Even the Church of England is dismissed as dangerously Marxist when it has the temerity to point out what is happening in some of our deprived areas.

Whole regions of this country have been turned into industrial deserts. A generation of young people has been written off. Youth unemployment in my borough is over 50 per cent. Adult unemployment is 25 per cent. On the main industrial estate, Huyton, in my constituency, the 6,800 jobs that existed in 1978 have been reduced to 3,000. My borough council has a five-year plan to create jobs. It has projected 630 new jobs over a five-year period that began in 1984. Just one closure, such as the Plessey closure last summer, can wipe out the whole of that projected five-year gain.

The harsh unpalatable truth, therefore, is that in areas such as mine the resources simply do not exist to generate a recovery on their own. With a few noble exceptions, private industry has failed spectacularly to help us to solve the problem. Without Government assistance there will never be a recovery in these areas and the quality of life will continue to collapse. In such areas the Government are therefore destroying the very values that they have the impertinence to claim as their own.

I shall not go as far as to say, "So much for caring capitalism", but I have come across an even more outrageous use of the English language. In his essay "The Moral Dimension", published by the Institute of Economic Affairs in 1978, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote:

"Capitalism is essentially based on voluntarism—the idea of voluntary co-operation and voluntary exchange."

I can tell the Chancellor and his colleagues that there is nothing voluntary about the 100,000 jobs lost on Merseyside since 1979, or the 4,500 jobs lost in the borough of Knowsley between 1982 and 1985.

Our motion condemns the callous, irresponsible economic policies pursued by the Government. Those policies deserve condemnation, not merely for inhumanity and callousness, although, God knows, that would be condemnation enough, but also as being wasteful, inefficient and profligate. The single greatest waste is of human skill, talent, intellect and endeavour which is spelt out in the monthly unemployment figures. The Government have forced whole communities to become dependent on the state, yet in the debate on the Address in 1978 the Prime Minister, then the Leader of the Opposition, declared that it was a disgrace and a reflection of four years of Labour Government that

"5 million people . . . have to have recourse to social security."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1978; Vol. 957, c. 24.]

Today, as a direct result of this Government's economic policies, that figure is 7·6 million. Far from feeling that that is a disgrace, the Government parade that figure as proof of their commitment to the welfare state.

As we have frequently pointed out, that has been happening while the country has been enjoying the one-off bonanza of North sea oil. The Government and their supporters tell us that we have no right to isolate this one national resource, even if it is so finite and temporary. That is a bit of a cheek because in the debate on the Address in November 1977 the right hon. Lady was at it again. She said that one way of judging how badly the Labour Government had done was

"to imagine what the position would be without the prospect of North Sea oil . . . They have neither policy nor strategy. They are running industry into decline, hoping that North Sea oil will rescue them . . . I do not think that North Sea oil will be used to strengthen industry."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1977; Vol. 938, c. 23-24.]

Those words should be judged against the sums received from North sea oil revenues. In 1976-77 the country received £81 million, and today it receives £11 billion, every penny piece of which has been wasted on keeping people unemployed while, to rephrase the Prime Minister's words of eight and a half years ago, this Government have been running industry, not so much into a decline, as to widespread destruction and disappearance.

I referred to the Disraeli lecture of the Conservative party chairman and I shall conclude with his words. A price, he intoned, has to be paid for freedom. He continued:

"Not just eternal vigilance but the acceptance of responsibility—not least responsibility for the consequences of one's own action."

If he and his colleagues are honest with themselves, they will recognise that it is time they accepted responsibility for the sheer misery which their economic policies have inflicted on so many people in deprived regions.

6.13 pm

Mr. Esmond Bulmer (Wyre Forest): I shall concentrate my remarks on the ability of manufacturing industry to generate jobs. Those who work in industry will understand the close correlation between confidence and willingness to invest. Perhaps industry looks to Government most to provide a consistent approach. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his predecessor have recognised that, and their Budget statements and speeches have made priorities absolutely clear: to control inflation, improve competitiveness and increase incentives. That is the only solid foundation for jobs. Today inflation is largely under control, and we have increased competitiveness, fewer strikes than at any time since the war, and an economy showing creditable growth for the fifth successive year.

Today's intemperate motion suggests that the Labour party has learnt little from its experience in the 1970s—or has it? Those of us who watched Brian Walden invite the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) into a new world where a new deal might be offered got the flavour of his temptation to ditch clause four and all that element of the Labour inheritance. However, the shadow of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and other hon. Members made him back away from that. He showed considerable interst in what Roosevelt achieved. If the right hon. Gentleman visits America, I hope that he will contrast the ability of the American economy to generate jobs with that of our economy. Some 19 million extra jobs were created in America between 1974 and 1984, whereas we lost 1 million jobs as a direct consequence of pay not keeping pace with inflation. However, that may not be the lesson that he seeks there.

There is one element of a new deal which the Labour party could deliver to industrial confidence. In the United States when Governments change, the ground rules are not dramatically changed. If the Labour party accepts, as some of its spokesmen do, that industrial confidence is part of sustaining jobs, at least we can all hold on to that. It would offer some hope for the future, if the Labour party ever formed another Government.

Equally, evidence regarding the Labour party's senior spokesmen suggests that much hard-won ground will be surrendered. Inflation will recur, trade union privilege will be restored, and industry's discretion to invest where its interests lie will be severely distorted. As a result, confidence will drain away.

If companies and their employees recognise that Government policy is stable, non-inflationary growth is more likely to be achieved. We have evidence of that before us, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is to be congratulated. One area of uncertainty where he does not have the control that he would wish is over exchange rates.

The variation in exchange rates is a matter of life and death to some companies. One such company in my constituency wrote:

"In recent weeks the pound has reached a level against European currencies that gives my company, and many others like us, a chance to compete with European manufacturers on equal terms. What is desperately needed now is for the Government to take the opportunity to enter the ERM and subsequently to accept the discipline that this will impose on its economic policy. I do not exaggerate in saying that my own company would be employing at least 50 more people than it is today, i.e. an 11 per cent. increase in our workforce, if this action had been taken when a suitable opportunity arose previously at the beginning of 1985. Furthermore, we would have been investing far more in new product and process development, new capital investment, and in employee training; all matters of vital importance to our company's and to the country's future."

I am sure that my right hon. Friends in the Government understand only too clearly what is being said, and that they will follow that with action when the opportunity occurs.

The Opposition motion refers to the destruction of the nation's manufacturing industry as if 1979 were some sort of miracle year, and Conservative Chancellors were uniquely responsible for the shake-out that followed the second oil shock, the winter of discontent and a long period of over-manning. Let us not pretend that we do not still have serious problems. Many of them are deep-seated and some go back a long way. The anti-industry culture probably goes back to the excesses of the industrial revolution. We have not had the change in attitude in our senior universities that we would like. I do not think that I am alone in wanting those universities to have a school for business studies at the same level as Harvard and Stanford.

We still have a predominance of talent in the City at the expense of manufacturing industry, and the rewards are disproportionate. We lack a home market large enough to provide a base from which to compete internationally. There is an imbalance in too many areas in the power of the retailer against the manufacturer. We have a trade union movement that still finds it more comfortable to look backward rather than forward and a Civil Service that has not been sufficiently schooled in the real world to carry out efficiently the tasks given to it by politicians, who too often lack the relevant experience to compensate for this weakness.

Let us not pretend that these problems will be solved overnight.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): What about management?

Mr. Bulmer: I shall not argue that there is no scope for improvement, but I think that it has improved.

Mr. Prescott: As in the unions.

Mr. Bulmer: Let us not pretend that, whatever the Government, manufacturing industry will rapidly create the number of jobs that have been lost to modern technology. In 1974, the carpet industry in my constituency was employing 1,500 people; now, it employs under 500 people. Many hon. Members will see that happening in their constituencies. The print industry is only the most recent example. We can expect that the problems facing agriculture and, later, banking will lead to many more job losses.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is right to promote small business and self-employment, to finance training on an unprecedented scale and to make it cheaper to employ the young and unskilled. After all, that was the thrust of his last Budget. None of those aims can be described as callous and irresponsible.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will return in his next Budget to the theme of encouraging the long-term competitiveness of industry, and the means of fostering research and development and encouraging higher investment. There is no doubt that the loss of capital allowances is acting on some companies in a way which,

I suspect, was not intended. It would undoubtedly be helpful if my right hon. Friend could see his way clear to introduce a 25 per cent. straight line depreciation.

I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) in wishing to see more evidence of long-term thinking. Exposure to market forces has led to dramatic improvements in productivity but the stock market is too short-term. We all know very well that many companies would like to take investment decisions in the medium term, let alone the long term, but are afraid to do so because of the impact on short-term profitability. They are afraid that it might invite unwelcome takeover bids.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will think in the time leading up to the Budget about how to encourage long-term investment decisions and provide some protection from the stock exchange raid. There are many more medium-sized companies in Germany than in Britain because capital taxation there has not driven companies to the market. Public companies which are perhaps protected by discretionary trusts find that the 10-year valuations for capital gains tax can mean that a great many shares have to be sold, opening them to the possibility of a takeover bid.

The measure that offers perhaps most hope for the future is profit sharing, with many more companies having profit sharing schemes and a significant body of employees owning shares and speaking for the work force. Many of us find the takeover of a company and the dismissal of many people wholly offensive. There is no doubt that there should be more protection for the company that is doing a decent job.

I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East in wishing to see wider co-operation, especially in Europe. The greater financial strength of so many United States and Japanese companies demands that we identify our strategic interest and take steps to preserve it, or the most that we shall preserve is a series of minority holdings through pension funds and investment trusts. Perhaps that matter cannot be debated in public, but I think that we should all like much more assurance.

I regret the intemperate language of the motion. The problems of unemployment are far too serious for that. In industry we have learned the hard way the price of adversarial politics. It is time that hon. Members came out of their trenches more often and sought common ground.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is just time to call one more Back Bencher. I understand that the first of the Front-Bench speakers wishes to rise at 6.30 pm.

6.25 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): It is proper for the House to return to the subject of unemployment at the Opposition's bidding, because it is the main economic, social and, I would emphasise, moral issue facing Britain. The chronic multi-million mass unemployment is an appalling waste of resources and a crime against those whose souls rot on the dole in enforced idleness through no fault of their own.

There is no sign that anyone has come to grips with the size, scope or gravity of the problem. I do not suppose that anyone consciously thought in 1979, "Let us adopt policies that will cause unemployment of 4 million to 5 million." Yet that is what has happened. There is no sign of any improvement. The prospect that beckons is a continuation of mass unemployment into the foreseeable future.

Perhaps the most worrying feature is the relentless, remorseless growth within the overall total of the percentage of long-term unemployed, who now number 1·6 million. About 823,000 people have been unemployed for two years and 533,000 people have been out of a job for three years. Many have given up hope of ever working again, or of ever working at all, because many have not worked since leaving school and have never known anything other than a workless, jobless society. Many people are marrying and starting families never having had a job. In some areas, the whole of the young generation are being alienated and shut out of society. We tolerate this at our peril. We are storing up a time bomb for the future.

If a society kicks these young people in the teeth, we must hope that they do not return the compliment. Is it any wonder that, in some areas, especially where there is an additional layer of disadvantage—racial disadvantage—the situation can become explosive? The greatest distress is among the long-term unemployed. As clothes and household items wear out, the money is not there to replace them. It adds insult to injury that the long-term unemployed are the only group not allowed the higher rate of long-term benefit.

What are we to do about the problem? We cannot carry on in the old way, with the same tired, ineffective policies. The Government must be receptive to new ideas. There must be new approaches. At present, there is a complete failure of imagination. We must use our wits and intelligence to address this problem. That is what the Select Committee on Employment has been doing for the past year.

Is it not an amazing paradox that we are surrounded on all sides by acute, growing, unmet needs, both public and private, accompanied by resources, both human and material, which are left idle? Is that not crazy and uneconomic? We pay people to stay at home in idleness when so much needs to be done. When we have these unmet needs and unused resources, is it really beyond our wits to put the two together? It may be said that market forces are not doing this. I would say, "Too bad for market forces." We must find other ways to resolve this paradox. During the war, when we wanted tanks, guns and aeroplanes, we did not leave it to market forces—we mobilised our intelligence in a great national effort. That is what we must do now.

A good example is the fact that there is a £20 billion backlog in repairs for council housing, yet we pay half a million building workers to stay at home. Does that make any sense? It is a failure on the part of all of us. We must be able to do better. The Select Committee considered this problem carefully for a year. We concluded that no usual or orthodox upturn in the economy was likely or in prospect that would provide the millions of new jobs in two or three years to dent the current unemployment level. The Committee therefore recommended, as well as a mix of measures to regenerate the economy, an immediate programme of special employment measures for quick action in the short term with the target being the long-term unemployed, where the need is greatest.

We studied cutting taxation as a means of creating jobs but that is a comparatively expensive way of creating jobs.

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

The net cost of an unemployed person is £47,000. Special employment measures which cost between £3,000 or £4,000 per person are obviously the best buy if the aim is to reduce unemployment. These measures produce 10 times the number of jobs as tax cuts and the measures can be targeted at the long-term unemployed. The number of long-term unemployed is 1·6 million. Our recommendation is that we should provide a job guarantee to the long-term unemployed. That could be done by providing about 1 million jobs. The community programme is being expanded to a quarter of a million places. Where are the other three quarters of a million jobs to come from? One obvious source is urban rehabilitation.

We recommend that there should be a programme of building improvements with 300,000 extra jobs provided at a net cost of £1·5 billion. The second part of the programme would be in health and personal social services —especially helping with care in the community. An extra 100,000 jobs could be found here at a net cost of £400 million. The third part of the programme would be a wage subsidy to employers in the private sector of £40 a week to take on 350,000 long-term unemployed in addition to present staff. That would cost £1·4 billion.

That is a necessarily short summary of our recommendations, which would result in a million extra jobs introduced over a three-year period at an additional cost, when operating fully, of £3·3 billion. I ask the Government to consider these recommendations carefully and not to give a knee-jerk rejection to them. It is not a programme of make-work; it is real work with a socially useful output. The Select Committee report has been carefully researched and, indeed, we sought a second opinion from the London Business School. The Government have not fallen over themselves to accept the report and they talk of the cost involved. I ask them to consider the gravity of the problem and to ask how serious they are in tackling it. After all, what is the cost of the dole queue? It is approaching £20 billion. The sum of £3·3 billion is less than the cost of the Falklands operation and only a third of the cost of defeating the miners' strike.

It is not money down the drain. If there were an extra million workers they would create an enormous amount of added value and we might find that the programme, had paid for itself. The Government must not say there is no alternative. There is an alternative in the report of the Select Committee. The Government must consider the report and give us a debate in Government time. If we adopt this programme, it will bring back hope and raise the morale and spirit of the nation.

6.33 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The debate has revealed the House's strong feelings about unemployment and the type of policies that would be pursued if the House decided to reduce it. The right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) went a long way to express our views about the problems of unemployment and the scale of the necessary changes to the economy if we were committed to full employment. I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman will probably not join us in the Lobby this evening. We understand that the various candidates for leadership of the Conservative party have various means of expressing their points of view—loyalty to the Government or the need to be caring capitalists. The debate has shown the division between those who believe the Government can do something about the level of unemployment and those who do not.

The right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East also mentioned some of the improvements in the economy. We do not dispute that there have been some improvements in the economy and that we need improved productivity and improved investment in our industries. That is our case, too. However, in various parts of the economy, there are major challenges to the traditional attitudes about how to bring about change. We do not argue that change is easy, but changes must be made. What is the role of the Government in the process of change?

The major indictment of this Government and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is that they have reiterated their ideological belief in the supremacy of the market—public expenditure is bad but private expenditure is good. When one talks to private business men one discovers that they depend to a considerable extent on expenditure in public industries. The bus industry is an example. It has collapsed because of deregulation. Orders for buses have fallen from 30,000 to about 9,000. There have been grave difficulties and unemployment in the private sector because of its dependence on orders from the public sector.

Our major argument with the Government is on their belief in a laissez-faire approach. The Government believe that the market is the best determinant of our economy and the levels of unemployment. If the market produces the present record high levels of unemployment, the Government can stand aside and be completely indifferent to the consequences in the knowledge that that it is the result of market forces at work.

We have heard a great deal about the levels of unemployment but I do not intend to go into the various statistics. It is sufficient to say that unemployment is at a record level and has been so almost every month since this Government came to power. Unemployment continues to increase.

The level of unemployment is deliberately maintained by Government policy. A report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that the average level of unemployment in Britain since 1979 has risen above the average for OECD countries. Under previous Governments—Tory and Labour—levels of unemployment always remained at the OECD average. There has been a significant change since 1979. The Library has worked out that that change represents approximately an extra 1 million unemployed. The OECD's conclusions are that the difference can be explained by the Tory Government's different public expenditure programmes.

Those conclusions are serious evidence to substantiate the charge that the Government's policies have caused higher unemployment than has been experienced under previous Tory Governments or indeed Labour Governments, which pursued different policies.

There was a claim from the Conservative Benches that the level of the working population is higher than under the previous Labour Government. That is wrong. I know, Mr. Speaker, that one cannot say it is a lie, but it is factually wrong. The evidence is there for all to see. The working population grew by 40 per cent. in the five years of Labour Government but when we left office more than

500,000 more people were in work. Now, however, well over 1 million fewer people are in work. These are the facts, and we should address ourselves to them.

The Government believed that radical reform was necessary when they came to power. They set the market free and removed the obstacles. They followed a policy of deregulation and privatisation and they reduced employees' rights, trade union representation and gave tax deductions for companies. The result has been a trade deficit. Listening to the Chief Secretary, one would almost believe that there was no trade deficit. The consequences of the Government's policies is a shift from a £4 billion surplus to a £9 billion deficit. They have also produced record unemployment.

The Government have had one success—over profits. The idea of reducing the burden of taxation on companies was to release resources so that we would get investment and jobs. It is interesting to see what happened to profits. Between 1981 and 1984, gross profits secured by companies rose by 45 per cent. As a proportion of gross domestic product, they increased from 9·1 per cent. to 14 per cent. — almost a 6 per cent. shift. Productivity increased, so profitability increased. As a result of that favourable tax treatment, industry received £14·4 billion in extra profits. That is fine if the result is increased employment, increased investment or more training.

The money clearly did not go into wages as there was only a 2 per cent. increase in wages in real terms during that period. The proportion of gross domestic product paid in wages fell by 5 per cent. Industry saved about £5 billion in wages and salaries. It is clear, therefore, that it was not pressure from wages and salaries that caused difficulty with investment.

There was no shortage of money for investment. We were told that the skill and potential of managers would release resources. The trouble is that we do not have such managers in the main. Their flair and foresight led them to put 0·15 per cent. of turnover into training, whereas our competitors invest 2 per cent. The Manpower Services Commission tells us that America spends about £1,500 per head on training, compared to our £200. The Government reduced the regulations, got rid of training boards and closed training centres. The result has been a collapse of training for the very people who, although on the dole now, could be used to advantage when the economy gets moving again.

The decision was made not by unions but by management. Such incompetence is almost unique to Britain. Training is regarded as a cost, not as an investment, in Britain. It is a major problem for our management. It is not as though they are short of money —profits have increased by nearly £15 billion. Where did it go? Perhaps it all went in investment. We know, however, that, far from maintaining the earlier level of investment, we had disinvestment to the tune of £5 billion. That is the scale of the decline. Investment in manufacturing is now lower than it was in 1979.

Those facts are gleaned from Government reports and the Treasury. So where did the money go? Presumably it was invested in property in New York and the like. It is exactly the same problem that an earlier Tory Government found. When they released such forces, the money was invested in property, not in manufacturing.

I have said that wages increased by only 2 per cent. in real terms, but the increase was not across the board. The top 10 per cent. secured a 16 per cent. increase last year, whereas the lowest 10 per cent. suffered a 5 per cent. fall in income. The people who really benefited are those with share options. It is said that they have had a 180 per cent. increase in salary. They are the people on the Confederation of British Industry council. They are the people who, like Sir Terence Beckett, maintain, "You get nowt for nowt." They are putting something like 180 per cent. more into their pockets but complaining about wage increases of 2 per cent.

I am glad to say that things will change. I recently read a *CBI News* report of what the Prime Minister said. It was she who brought the top people's pay awards to the House on the same day that she introduced legislation to reduce wages for employees in wages councils industries from about £45 a week. They get less in a week than many of those who work in the City get in one hour. *CBI News* reported:

"'Some of them', she admits, 'are being drawn to the City rather than to industry in pursuit of the biggest salaries', and she deplores it."

Is that not evidence of the market system? Is that not what it is supposed to be about, and what we are supposed to applaud?

The report continues:

"'But, you know, we cannot do anything about this. We have got to do something about jobs.'"

This is the heart of the argument. She says about Government:

"'All we can do,' argues the Prime Minister, 'is to create artificial jobs.'"

That did not seem to put the Chancellor off when he told us, the last time he came to the House, that unemployment would come down. It was a Budget for jobs, he told us. What were the artificial jobs that he spoke of? An increase in community schemes and in the youth training scheme of nearly 200,000 places. That is how much the Government are fiddling the figures, ready for the election, to get a reduction in unemployment, or what the Prime Minister calls "artificial jobs". We do not dismiss them as artificial.

If we are to return to full employment, there will have to be major changes in the labour market. We cannot produce enough jobs out of manufacturing industry or enough jobs of 40 hours a week. However, all manner of community services are crucial to society. There is an alternative to what the Chancellor said—what was it, a 1 per cent. reduction in wages leading to 150,000 jobs? The highest unemployment has been suffered among people whose wages have decreased. We know that the Treasury fiddled the figures. Warwick university showed that they fiddled the model. The Paymaster General's Department fiddled the information in reports, as I said last night.

Many choices have been presented to the House, whether by wets in the Tory party, the Centre Forwards, the Social Democratic party or the Church, which is called Marxist when it suggests that people should be got back to work. There is a range of choices. The latest is that presented by the Employment Select Committee which my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), its Chairman, outlined. It showed where there could be 500,000 jobs in a range of activities at a cost of £3 billion.

It is not that we cannot provide work to enable people to make a useful contribution or that we cannot find the money to pay for it; the decision is political. The Paymaster General came here with the liberal face of the

[Mr. John Prescott]

Tory approach. He had the heart, the concern and the smile, but it was he who rubbished the Select Committee report before it had reached the press. He made it absolutely clear that any possibility of creating work or of reducing unemployment was not an acceptable proposition. In the next 12 months, the Labour party will spell out precisely where the 1 million jobs to which we are committed will come from, how they will be financed and what the consequences will be.

I have heard a lot about housing. The Government have produced 2,000 fewer houses per week for every week that they have been in office than Labour. If we used the £6 billion which local authorities have to meet housing needs, 500,000 building workers could be put to work. That is a positive way in which to get people back to work. The point at issue here is whether the Government have any desire to do anything to reduce unemployment.

6.47 pm

The Paymaster General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I was most nearly moved to audible dissent when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) went over the old ground and said that we are deliberately keeping unemployment up, but I am quite sure that he does not believe that. The debate is between a range of opinions about what led to unemployment doubling under the Labour Government, to it increasing again while we have been in office, and what is to be done now to get the figures down.

I almost agreed with the hon. Gentleman in parts of his speech. He was worried about training in industry, and about the effects of extremely high salaries in the City. I look forward to discussing with him or hearing from him what he proposes to do about either problem. However, he will appreciate my difficulty. I have 12 minutes in which to respond to policy contributions from three directions. If I can exercise that self-discipline which I usually fail to achieve when winding up debates, to do justice to all of the sides I must try to give about five minutes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), about two minutes to the Liberal party and about five minutes to the Labour party. That would not do justice to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Bulmer), who made an extremely thoughtful speech, with the bulk of which I entirely agreed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East first brought me into the Government. I spent a time serving as a Whip in his Whips Office. I still listen to my right hon. Friend's speeches with the slight feeling of someone listening to a former headmaster giving an end of term report. I am glad to say that our personal relations are somewhat friendlier than that.

I listened to the strategy my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East set out. He was the only speaker in the debate who set out in detail the policy options that he would propose to deal with the problem. The Opposition Front Bench certainly did not come forward with any policy. My right hon. Friend did not launch a diatribe against Government policies. Instead he made a number of points with which I wholly agree. Looking at the policies he was advocating, one can only conclude that the Government amendment should be supported.

I agree with my right hon. Friend's remarks about international co-operation. He described the need for that co-operation between developed countries all of which suffer from the same dire problems of persistently high unemployment. He gave credit to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in their efforts to gain greater co-operation and stability in exchange rates and so on.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the commitment to growth that is required. I would point out to him that there have been five years of sustained growth in this country. That growth is high by our own historical standards and high in relation to that of our neighbours. That growth must be sustained and if possible taken beyond the present 3 per cent. level. My right hon. Friend talked about the importance of backing manufacturing industry in connection with growth. I agree that it is essential to boost the wealth-creating capacity of manufacturing industry to sustain the level of growth which my right hon. Friend mentioned.

I agree with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest—a point was also raised by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)—that we must not look to support declining manufacturing industry as a means of eliminating our present unemployment problems. Technological advance in that area means that we may be able to generate more wealth but we will not return to the days of mass unemployment on the workshop floor. That is why the Government have put the emphasis on the service industries, tourism and leisure, small businesses and self-employment. Those will be the growth areas in the economy over the next few years.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest in his remarks about industrial policy. The difficulty, of course, is to achieve the balance, which he was trying to describe, between supporting industry without intervening or subsidising those sectors which are failing and declining.

I agree that we must protect our industries against unfair foreign competition. We must also maintain a positive public sector purchasing policy. However, neither my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest nor I would like to advocate protectionism as that could lead to the defence of weakened industries.

I support my hon. Friend's views on regional policy. Not before time have we made regional policy more rational and concentrated its employment-generating effects on more closely targeted areas. In response to my hon. Friend, I can say that I am now closely connected with inner city policy. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is not just the amount of money that is important but how that money is put to best effect. Central Government are now putting £670 million into the inner cities and we must ensure that that is targeted in such a way that the residents in those areas are aware of a great improvement in job prospects. I could continue to relate areas of agreement with my hon. Friend but I wish to stress that the debate conspicuously lacked any policy proposals from the Labour party of the kind my right hon. and hon. Friends mentioned.

The Government are, however, examining planning constraints that inhibit enterprise, labour mobility and so on. We are also in favour of continuing the expansion of the road programme. Planning and design problems would lead anybody looking at the road programme to realise that it cannot be accelerated more than it is now. The trouble with capital spending, and the reason why it is not the simple answer that the Opposition propose, is that the programme is not labour-intensive enough in modern circumstances to be a complete answer to the problem. There is no great gulf between myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) made his contribution on behalf of the Liberal party. The hon. Gentleman is consistent in his speeches at Liberal party conferences and thereafter, as he always returns to the subject of incomes. We must accept that one of the difficulties in analysing the problems of unemployment is that unit labour costs continue to rise. We are not as successful in keeping labour costs down as are some of our major competitors. The hon. Gentleman will not carry me back to the policies of the 1970s to which he is plainly committed.

The hon. Gentleman came up with a new phrase today. He said that he was in favour of some form of restrictive pay strategy. The hon. Gentleman normally calls a spade a spade and talks about a statutory incomes policy. He was anxious to make it clear that that would not apply to anybody in dispute at the moment as he is in favour of a £4 billion settlement for a wide group of public sector workers who might consider his proposal as a kind of threat. The hon. Gentleman has not solved the problem of how to make a statutory incomes policy stick.

The Labour party did not address itself to incomes. That topic was notably absent from Opposition Members' speeches, although there was a mention about City salaries which I accept is a fair subject to complain about.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who led for the Opposition, presumably had a hand in the choice of this debate and I assumed that he would put forward an alternative economic strategy which would give us a guide as to how the Labour party would tackle unemployment if it were in office. The right hon. Gentleman did nothing of the kind. He spent a great deal of time simply having a knockabout swipe at the unemployment figures, something that his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) normally does better. When I tied the right hon. Gentleman down to why he said that the Government were fiddling the unemployment figures, he cited the changes that were made in 1982 for claimants, when the unemployed were no longer required to register at jobcentres. That was explained at the time and made a difference of about 100,000 to the unemployment figure. From 1983 we also said that men over 60 who were registering to keep their national insurance credits, and sometimes to get benefit, no longer had to register. That made a difference of another 162,000 to the figure. Even with these reductions, I cannot see how the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook reached his figures. The right hon. Gentleman knows why the Government did that.

Mr. Prescott: They were fiddling the figures.

Mr. Clarke: It was a tedious task for former school teachers and former bank managers to sign on at benefit offices simply to get credited with their national insurance contributions. Is the shadow Chancellor's solution to the problem of getting accurate unemployment figures to bring back that meaningless nonsense of everyone having to traipse to the benefit office once a week to sign on? I have already explained the difference in the figures and the right hon. Gentleman cannot reach the figure he was claiming.

The right hon. Gentleman cannot ignore the labour force survey. When we produced the labour force survey and compared it with the number of claimants, it showed that 870,000 people in 1984 were not included in the count of claimants looking for work. It also showed that there were 940,000 people included in the claimant count who either had a job or were not seeking one.

The result of the labour force survey is that the unemployment figure is somewhat below 3·4 million. I have always candidly described those figures at Question Time as never being exact and have always said that we should look at ways of improving the calculation of the figures. The main constraint, when we try to obtain more accurate figures, comes from hon. Members who make easy, knockabout speeches trying to claim that we are fiddling the figures.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I have no time to give way. I would give way to the right hon. Gentleman if I had more time because, when I looked for policies in his speech, all I could see was his reference to directed reflation.

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: The right hon. Gentleman does not want to hear about directed reflation.

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will give way and see whether the right hon. Gentleman wishes to improve on the policy he put forward of directed reflation coupled with a commitment that the Labour Government would not raise the standard rate of income tax. That was the policy which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury analysed and so reduced the right hon. Gentleman to silence. The right hon. Gentleman has a minute in which to put a little more flesh on those pathetic bones.

Mr. Hattersley: I confirm both those policies. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has spent most of the time in his consideration of my speech discussing the unemployment statistics. Is it or is it not a fact that if the unemployment figure was calculated on the pre-Tebbit basis it would be 3·8 million and not 3·4 million?

Mr. Clarke: I guess that it would be about 3·6 million, because the right hon. Gentleman would include many people who are not unemployed but who go into the benefit office to obtain credit for their national insurance contributions. It is no good the shadow Chancellor arguing about the figures. Our policies on the service industries and tourism and the direct measures that we are taking at huge cost are more effective than anything he put forward.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 293.

Division No. 72] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Aitken, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sean Hughes and
Mr. Ron Davies.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'brok)*
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith

Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Charles
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Rt Hon J. E.
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prior, Rt Hon James
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes that the Government's success in the battle against inflation has already brought with it nearly five years of soundly based economic growth and rising living standards; applauds the achievement of manufacturing industry in raising productivity to record levels; and welcomes the continuing rise in the number of people in work.

Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill (Committee)

7.13 pm

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): I beg to move,

That leave be given to the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill to sit with two members to-morrow and thereafter.

I regret that I have found it necessary to take up the time of the House with the motion. Perhaps I should explain the background.

On 13 May 1985, the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill was given a Second Reading by a majority of 136. The Bill's main purpose is to extend Felixstowe dock: it is a controversial proposal and a number of local interest groups have petitioned against it. It began its Committee stage before an Opposed Private Bill Committee, consisting of four members, on 3 December. The Committee has so far taken evidence on 14 days and the promoters have indicated to me that a further 12 days may be necessary to complete proceedings.

Both in December and since the House resumed in January, the Committee has been in difficulties over its quorum. The original membership was the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). On 29 January the hon. Member for Cynon Valley asked to be replaced on the Committee and the Committee adjourned pending the nomination of a replacement by the Committee of Selection. The Committee of Selection, exceptionally, acceded to her request to be replaced, and put the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on the Committee in her place. However, neither the hon. Member for Worsley nor the hon. Member for Leeds, Central has attended the Committee since it adjourned on 29 January.

I understand that attempts have since been made to find Opposition Members willing to serve on the Committee, but they have been unsuccessful and the Committee now lacks a quorum. Under Standing Order No. 121, it cannot sit in the absence of more than one of its members, except by leave of the House. That leave is what the House will give if it passes this motion.

My responsibility, as Chairman of Ways and Means, is to ensure that arrangements are made to allow the procedures of the House to apply to this Bill: in particular, the promoters of the Bill, and the petitioners against it, should have a proper opportunity to make their case heard in Committee. I believe that it would be a harmful precedent if the progress of a private Bill were to be inhibited in this way, since it would call into question the very procedures which Parliament itself had established. If the Bill were not to be allowed to proceed, it might follow that any private Bill could be blocked if Members of one of the main parties in the House were to refuse to serve on the Committee. I doubt whether that is what the House wishes.

In all the circumstances, allowing the Committee to proceed with a reduced quorum seems to be the most realistic option before the House. Such motions have been passed on previous occasions—in 1890, in 1897 and much more recently in 1965—when Committees on private Bills were unable to proceed for lack of a quorum. The motion does not prevent other members being added to the Committee by the Committee of Selection; nor does it prevent the members of the Committee who have been absent from attending meetings of the Committee. If those concerned could enable the Bill to proceed in either of those ways, I think it would be far more satisfactory. But, unless and until they do so, the need to give both the promoters and the petitioners a full and proper hearing in Committee seems to me overriding.

I hope that the House will share that view and will support the motion.

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have not selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton).

7.17 pm

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): The House may wonder why a Scottish Member has suddenly taken an interest in Felixstowe. I must confess that I am not too much concerned with the merits or demerits of the Bill——

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Sit down then.

Mr. Hamilton: I shall not take instructions on that or any other matter from the hon. Gentleman.

My attention was drawn to the matter by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) who was elected to the House to represent a constituency in South Wales. There are manifold problems in her constituency, as everyone should know. Moreover, she was appointed as a member of the Committee dealing with the Gas Bill. She judged that her constituents were more interested in the Gas Bill and the purloining of public assets by private enterprise than with what might or might not happen in Felixstowe. She therefore came to me. I do not know why she came to me. Perhaps it was because she is of the same rebellious nature as I am. I advised her to quit the Committee. She sought to make inquiries as to what that might imply. The Committees for private Members' Bills are the only Committees in the House at which attendance is compulsory. If one does not attend, one might be fined. I said to her, "Go down in history, Ann, and be bloody well fined." She wisely took my advice and the consequences are here before us.

Let me make it clear to the Chairman of Ways and Means, for whom I have a great respect and affection, that I know that he is saddled with the problem. By a decision of the House, he is given important discretionary powers and duties to deal with private Bills. That is the matter with which I propose to deal, not the merits of the Bill, although I am bound to say that considerable commercial interests are involved and, if the Bill goes through, substantial profits are to be made from the results.

I took the precaution of looking up in "Erskine May" the history of private Bill procedure, which is briefly referred to on page 858 of the 20th edition. It explains how the practice of private Bills grew out of ancient practice, long before adult enfranchisement, whereby the only way that people who were not represented in the House could make representations to it was by petition.

The rights of petitioners and the power of the House of Commons to deal with petitions were set out in two resolutions of the House of Commons in 1669. That beats the precedents quoted by the Chairman of Ways and Means by about 100 years or so. Those rights were

embodied in two resolutions, one dealing with the right to petition and the right of the House to receive petitions, and the other with the right and privilege of the House to judge and determine how far such petitions were fit or unfit to be received. "Erskine May" says:

"These two resolutions of general import formed part of a group of resolutions, the rest of which related specifically to trading matters in the East Indies, and reflected a serious quarrel between the two Houses (the 'Skinner Dispute.')"

That is still going on. "Erskine May" continues:

"In an effort to settle the controversy, the House later acceded to a royal command that the entire group of resolutions be erased from the Journal."

After the first Reform Act, there was a vast increase in the number of petitions presented to the House, so a series of Standing Orders were adopted in 1842 to inhibit the debate on petitions. Consequently, the numbers significantly declined.

"Erskine May" goes on to say that from about 1700 a growing number of private Bills began to be produced and were concerned with matters such as the building and construction of toll roads—we shall be getting back to those soon—canals, railways, reservoirs, and so on, with local government matters. In modern times, most private Bills are those promoted by local authorities and statutory bodies for the better fulfilment of their functions and the conferring of powers that the ordinary law does not give them.

In passing private Bills, Parliament still exercises its legislative functions, but its proceedings also assume a judicial character. In those proceedings, the members of the Committees are generally bored to tears by the vested legal interests who are paid by the hour—unlike us. Hon. Members sit there, but the lawyers present the case for and against, and have a vested interest in prolonging the agony.

The various kinds of private Bills are dealt with at length in "Erskine May" and I do not propose to bore the House by going through them. The Chairman of Ways and Means is given considerable duties and discretions in dealing with the passage of private Bills, dating from 1848 and laid down in various standing orders. I shall quote again from "Erskine May", on page 1002, which deals with a quorum—our problem tonight. It says:

"The committee may not proceed if more than one of the members is absent, unless by special leave of the House; and no member of a committee on an opposed private bill may absent himself, except in case of illness, or by leave of the House. Members absenting themselves are reported to the House at its next sitting.

Formerly the House ordered such members to attend the next sitting of the committee, but if their absence was occasioned by illness, domestic anxiety, or other sufficient cause, no such order was made."

As far as I can gather, there is no fixed limit to the number that can constitute a quorum in a private Bill Committee, but this Committee happens to have four members, two Labour and two Conservative, the Chairman being a Conservative. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley was not asked but told to serve on the Committee, as is the practice.

I recall that when I first came to the House my Scottish Whip was a venerable grey-haired old gentleman called George Mathers. We used to describe him as God's PPS, he was so gentle. Very soon he came to see me, put his arm around my shoulder, as I remember, and implied that I had been singled out for preferential treatment. It went to my head right away, but that is the closest I have got to any official appointment. I served on that Committee and I vowed that I would never serve on another—I have not. I warn new hon. Members that if their Whip comes around and puts his arm around the shoulders of one of them, he should tell him to go to hell. This procedure is absurd.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley properly resented being compelled to attend this nonsense. She is a rebellious, stubborn character—a lady of my own heart. I encouraged her in all her rebellious ways, and I want to put on record one or two facts which might be less amusing to the House. The Chairman of Ways and Means has had to overcome the difficulty presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). No doubt he had appropriate advice from whatever quarters.

I do not know whether there was agreement through the usual channels, but I rather suspect that there might have been and I would not be surprised if there were, but even if there were not it does not matter a hoot to me. I shall state my views on the matter because it is reprehensible that the Chairman of Ways and Means has been authorised by the House to adopt a procedure whereby, if his motion is accepted, we might have the prospect of the Bill going through Committee and its remaining stages by the co-operation of two Conservative Members. They would be sitting in cahoots upstairs deciding that a private company, which has made considerable financial contributions to the Tory party funds—*[Interruption.]* That prospect is now possible, indeed probable, if the motion is accepted. I have no wish to criticise the Chairman of Ways and Means. He is going through the correct procedures.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): My hon. Friend is probably not aware that the system he has just described became even more ludicrous. The Chairman of Ways and Means has already said that I have not attended any meetings. That is true. I received a letter from the Private Bill Office saying that I had been appointed to the Committee, and a certificate which I had to sign to say that I would not vote upon anything on which I had not heard evidence or attended. I was blithely told in the letter of appointment that 14 days of evidence had already been given. That is ludicrous, as I imagine my hon. Friend would agree.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend underlines the need for the House to provide the appropriate machinery to have a good long look at the way in which we deal with private Bills. I see the Chairman of Ways and Means nodding assent, and I think that the sooner we get down to that the better because the dangers, or potential dangers, in this procedure are underlined by the passage of this particular Bill.

I believe that over the past few years this House has increasingly been dominated by outside private financial interests. The stench is growing more objectionable and disturbing every week. I have talked about the company involved in the Bill going through the House. That company has made contributions to Tory party funds for some years. For the year ending December 1977 it paid £10,000; for the year ending December 1978 it paid £15,050; for 1979 the figure was £15,000; for 1980, index linked obviously, the figure was £20,250. For 1981 the figure was £21,000.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I bet they did not have a postal ballot.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is right. For 1982 the figure was £26,000; in 1983, election year, it was £60,000 and in 1984 it was £33,000. That is democracy. For all I know the Government might have incited the company to bring forward a Bill——

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. We cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at the same time.

Mr. Hamilton: The Government might have incited the company to bring forward a private Bill by saying, "The procedures of the House are such that we can guarantee that the Bill will get through and therefore your profits will be increased and, as a consequence, you can make bigger contributions to our funds". That is typical of what is happening in the House and what has been increasingly happening over the past six years.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I say to the House and the country it is time that this kind of corruption ended. That is why we intend to oppose it tonight.

7.35 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): There is a certain kind of Committee formed from Members of the House which is of a judicial nature rather than of the normal political nature. That category certainly includes private Bill Committees and the Standing Orders Committee. Whereas in a normal Standing Committee the complexion of the Committee roughly reflects the party strengths on the Floor of the House, and indeed the Committee of Selection usually appoints Members who have expressed a particular interest in the subject in Second Reading debates——

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): What is the point of order?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: If the hon. Lady had been listening to the proceedings she would have discovered that the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) had finished speaking and that Mr. Deputy Speaker called me.

As I was saying, on a Standing Committee there is a political composition of the Committee. On those Committees which have a judicial function, that most certainly is not so. Moreover, I understand that the Committee of Selection does its best to exclude from such a Committee those who have a personal or constituency interest in its outcome. I should have thought that it was essential for the fair and just dealing between this House and petitioners that private Bill Committees should proceed with reasonable expedition.

A private Bill confers upon an individual or a body corporate of some kind special rights which are not inherent in public general law and which are not commercially available, or it deprives other people of their normal rights under public general law. Therefore, it is essential that those whose rights and interests are affected should be entitled to petition against such private Bills if they want to — but, thank heavens, not necessarily employing lawyers to put their case for them. The important thing is that they can appear in person before such a Committee or, if they want to, they can hire a lawyer. For the private individual, that is a worrying and time-consuming process and it can also be very expensive.

If, therefore, members of the Committee abdicate their duty to this House and to those affected by the legislation, the result can only be quite unpredictable costs on those whose rights are potentially affected by the legislation, and chaos in their personal lives and in the organisation of their business affairs, because there is no way in which they can tell when their petition will be heard and when they will have an opportunity to speak in favour of it before the Committee.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does not this debate show the difficulty and ethical problem that arises when any person who is a contributor to any political party seeks to put a Bill through this House? Regardless of which party or which issue is involved, the principle is the same. If people are known financial supporters——

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Bermingham: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would listen. Regardless of party, person or matter, the principle is the same. Is that not the ethical problem being demonstrated in this debate?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I can only disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Ordinary duties are carried out by ordinary citizens—not hon. Members—such as serving on a jury. If the person being tried is of a known political persuasion, that does not mean that the juror is entitled to allow that to interfere with the discharge of his duty. That is the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Why is it that an ordinary citizen performing a judicial service, which it is his duty to do, can discharge that honourably and correctly, while a Member of this House cannot? Those are the bones of the matter — it has nothing to do with political contributions — *[Interruption.]* The Opposition appear not to want to hear what I am saying, for reasons that can only be disreputable.

It would be as wrong for Members of this House to allow facts within their knowledge about political contributions to affect their behaviour on a Committee dealing with a private Bill as it would be for a juror to allow such considerations to affect his judgment — *[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members disagree, they are attacking the whole basis of the jury system. They know that I am not a lawyer; I am merely stating what everyone knows to be the basis of justice in this country.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a slight fallacy in his argument? The courts go through only one manning procedure, while there are two alternatives for promoting this sort of enterprise—either a private Bill or a public inquiry.

The hon. Gentleman is righty concerned about the rights of the petitioners. However, it is far easier for individuals to appear at and make representations to a public inquiry — and through that, the inspector and, finally, the Minister to the House — than it is to go through the private Bill procedure. If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the rights of petitioners, he should advise the company to withdraw the Bill and ask for a local public inquiry. The issues will then be aired by local people who will have the best possible opportunity to object. It can then come to the House for political decision.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I am not in the least concerned with the merits or otherwise of the Bill. The hon.

Gentleman's argument could fairly be deployed on Second or Third Reading. We are tonight discussing something wholly different — whether hon. Members who are appointed to a private Bill Committee are entitled to exercise political likes or dislikes to frustrate the purpose for which that Committee was appointed. Of course, the Committee is appointed only if the Bill is opposed by petitioners.

I am firmly of the opinion—which I hope will be widely shared, irrespective of political affiliation—that when hon. Members are appointed to a Committee with a judicial function, they must act judiciously for the honour of this House and the expedition of its business — in fairness judicially both to the objectors via petitions and to the promoters of the Bill. That is their clear duty and they should discharge it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I wish to ask the hon. Gentleman a simple question; he may wish to consult his hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench. Is it true that the chairman of the Conservative party wrote to some hon. Members asking them to vote on Second Reading of the Bill when it first came before the House? If that is true, does not the House deserve some explanation?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman whether it is true or not — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman has asked me a question, so perhaps he will do me the courtesy of listening to my answer.

As the chairman of the Conservative party did not address any such letter to me, I can tell the hon. Gentleman quite truthfully that I do not know the answer to his question. His point might be relevant to a Second or Third Reading debate, but it is wholly irrelevant to my submission, namely, that hon. Members appointed to a judicial Committee, whether a private Bill Committee, a Standing Orders Committee, or whatever, have a duty to act faithfully, impartially and judiciously and not from political judgment or spite. That is an absolutely clear obligation. I hope that, on reflection, that obligation is accepted, irrespective of the political affiliations of hon. Members.

7.48 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton), I did not get a friendly tap on the shoulder or even a friendly telephone call; all I had was a postcard in the internal mail telling me that I had been appointed to the Committee considering the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill.

I had no idea what sort of task was being imposed on me until I turned up for the first sitting and was asked to sign a declaration, which had previously been sent to me in the post, stating that neither I nor my constituents had any financial interest in the subject under discussion. It is interesting that that is the only occasion on which an hon. Member is expected to make such a declaration. It demonstrates the importance that the House has given to those procedures.

I, too, have been searching through "Erskine May". I am pleased to say that some of the things that I read about have not been visited upon me as a result of absenting myself from the Committee. There is a whole paragraph on the strictures that can be applied to hon. Members who refuse to attend. Page 993 states:

"If the Committee of Selection is dissatisfied with a Member's excuse, it will require him to serve upon a committee, when his attendance will become obligatory, and if necessary will be enforced by the House."

The fact that the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers have not attempted to enforce any such measures upon me shows that the House needs reform.

"Erskine May" states that in 1845

"a Member did not attend a committee on a group of railway bills to which he had been nominated, and his absence was accordingly reported to the House in the prescribed manner. He stated to the House that a correspondence had taken place between the Committee of Selection and himself, in which he had informed them that he was already serving on two public committees, and that his serving on the railway group committee was incompatible with those duties. But the House ordered him to attend the railway committee.

In 1846 the Committee of Selection, not being satisfied with the excuses of Mr. Smith O'Brien"——

there is copious correspondence in *Hansard* between Mr. O'Brien, the Speaker and Officers of the House—

"nominated him a member of a committee on a group of railways bills in the usual manner. He did not attend the committee; his absence was accordingly reported to the House; and he was ordered to attend the committee on the following day. Being again absent, his absence was again reported; he attended in his place in the House and stated that he refused to attend the committee; upon which he was declared guilty of a contempt, and was committed to the custody of the Serjeant at Arms."

I am sure that the Serjeant at Arms is much relieved that he has not been called upon to fulfil the same function with me. Mr. Smith O'Brien's reason for not attending the Committee was that, as an Irish Member, he was not prepared to vote on matters that did not concern Ireland. He was not prepared to vote on matters relating to Scotland and England. He did not mention Wales.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): It was not worth mentioning.

Hon. Members: Put that on the record.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am sure that the comment of the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) was heard by everybody.

Mr. Burt *rose*——

Mrs. Clwyd: I hope that the people of Wales at the next election will treat the Conservatives in the way that they deserve.

Mr. Smith O'Brien, a Member for Limerick, spent 25 days in prison. Apparently the House of Commons had a prison at that time. It may still be here. He was subsequently discharged, but only after a motion was put forward by some of his hon. Friends. I hope that if anything similar happens to me, my hon. Friends will do likewise.

In reference to Mr. O'Brien's position, Mr. Disraeli said:

"Are we prepared to support this compulsory principle by which we shall enforce the attendance of Members on Committees? I hope not, more especially as the circumstances which had justified that principle are rapidly disappearing. The railway business at one time was supposed to last for seven years; but that anticipated pressure has disappeared, and, having disappeared, it is now open to the House to consider the expediency of enforcing the principle of compulsory attendance; a consideration which, if calmly and dispassionately entered into, might put an end to an occurrence which we all deplore."

Nothing has happened since to change a procedure that existed in 1846.

[Mrs. Clwyd]

Despite the tempting invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central, who has given me most valuable advice during the two years that I have been in the House——

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Three years.

Mrs. Clwyd: No, two years. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central said that this was a way of getting my name into the history books. Tempting though that suggestion may have been, my main reason for taking a stand on this issue is that the procedures are archaic and out of date. We should change the procedures and this is the only way to do so. Since I have been an hon. Member, I have believed that the working practices of the House need urgent root and branch reform.

The working hours and conditions, methods of debate, voting procedures, the operation of Select and Standing Committees, the lobbying system and the continuing absence of television have all been criticised. But change has not been given the necessary support by Parliament or any political party, although individual hon. Members have argued for such reforms. I hope that hon. Members will not be expected in future to experience the routine, rigorous and tedious demands on the time of hon. Members the opposed private Bill system puts upon them.

During the six weeks that I have been involved on the Bill, the issues have been about the rights of hon. Members on Committees and the practices and procedures of such Committees. For three days a week, for six weeks, we made our way down the corridors of the House of Lords, past the portraits of Shaftesbury and the hanging judge, Judge Jeffreys, to Committee Room 5. There were four of us and the chairman had a casting vote. I cast no aspersions on the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton). Throughout the procedure he has been a fair and just Chairman. Anything that I say tonight is not a criticism of the hon. Gentleman.

We have listened for long and tedious hours to the promoters of the Bill arguing their case, in excruciating detail, for being allowed to extend their docks into an area of outstanding natural beauty. The proceedings are semi-judicial in nature, because a Committee on a private Bill is not concerned merely with scrutinising the details and drafting of the Bill, as a Committee on a public Bill is or ought to be. Its primary duties are to decide whether the Bill is justified at all, whether the promoters really need it, and whether it is the only way of furthering their aims.

An onerous task is imposed on the Committee. It has to decide whether it is to the public advantage that the Bill should pass into law. Above all, it has to assess the claims of the opponents of the Bill—the petitioners against the Bill—who appear before it.

As has been mentioned, the company in question is owned by European Ferries, which was the sixth largest contributor to Tory party funds in 1983. It is not inconceivable that the former chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) might — I merely make the suggestion — encourage the company, by a nod and a wink, to embark on this extremely costly exercise because it could be sure of success.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Member give way?

Mrs. Clwyd: No, I am not giving way.

As one of the spokesmen for the objectors put it during our hearings,

"The company has chosen this route because it considers that it is its best chance of success."

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mrs. Clwyd: No. The hon. Member will have the opportunity to make his speech.

Hon. Members on the Committee are expected, on the evidence, to determine, in effect, United Kingdom port policy and environmental policy. If the Committee agrees to the extension of dock facilities at Felixstowe, there is no doubt that, as my hon. Friends and some Conservative Members know, ports such as Southampton, London, Tilbury, Liverpool and others will lose jobs as a result.

It is important that I should explain some of the background because it illustrates the task that we are putting on members of the Committee. To what extent a Channel tunnel will make the expansion of Felixstowe necessary seems not to have entered——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is beginning to stray into the merits of the Bill. She has been in order while talking about the difficulties of hon. Members serving on the Committee and the difficulties of obtaining a quorum, but it is not in order to discuss the merits of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it not be reasonable for my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) to develop her argument as an illustration? I am sure that you will accept that, although we are dealing with a Felixstowe Bill, the principle involved will extend to the proceedings on the Channel tunnel Bill when that comes before us. If a change in the quorum is made now, there may be arguments about changing the quorum for that Bill. I should have thought that as long as my hon. Friend is using her argument as an illustration she will not be too far out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Discussion of general principles and certain passing references are in order, but detailed discussion of the merits of the Bill is not in order.

Mrs. Clwyd: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for pointing out that I was straying from the main points of the debate. I was making a passing reference and I hope to pass quickly through that reference.

It is pertinent to investigate the relevance of a Channel link to future container traffic. I was told in answer to a parliamentary question on 29 January that the Government would not publish information about their assessment of how much container traffic would use the link. If the Government refuse to give crucial and pertinent information, how can four, three or two hon. Members — or even one hon. Member — decide whether it is in the national interest for Felixstowe docks to expand their container facilities? The company's whole case is built on the potential container handling capacity in the United Kingdom.

If the expansion went ahead, land designated by the Department of the Environment as an area of outstanding natural beauty would be used. The Bill is opposed by all the important environmental groups in Suffolk. The estuary is internationally important for the protection of thousands of wading birds there. Those considerations and

others have been spelt out in the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) and other hon. Members on several occasions.

Hon. Members appointed to the Committee on the Bill are being asked to determine whether it is in the national interest that the Bill should pass into law. I hope that I have illustrated that that is an important and difficult task. To put that burden on perhaps two hon. Members is unfair, unnecessary and unjust.

In normal circumstances an applicant seeks planning consent from a council. The company in question is making an application for a project that is a departure from the local structure plan, especially as it is in an area of outstanding natural beauty. Such companies should be compelled to seek planning consent. They know that by bypassing the system in this way they have a tremendous advantage, especially with the present Government.

The remedy would be——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady, but she is again straying into the merits of the Bill. Most of what she is saying is in order, but she must not discuss the merits of the Bill.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is inevitable that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has to deal with aspects of the Bill. She is arguing that the procedure——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not arguing with the ruling of the Chair. I am sure that the hon. Lady has taken the point that I made.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am moving on to the procedure. We must look at the alternatives. The remedy would be for the company to go through the established planning machinery —to apply for planning permission, to go to appeal, if necessary—and only when permission is granted should it be possible for it to come to Parliament to have some of the minor remaining difficulties ironed out.

Parliament is well equipped to discuss and settle the principle, but it should not have to get bogged down with the minutiae. I argue that hon. Members who have been involved in the Bill are being bogged down in the minutiae. My proposal would remove from Parliament matters that normally and properly come within planning law.

The Bill is an attempt to short circuit planning controls, thereby making it a favoured case. In other words, it seeks planning permission by the back door.

It was totally unfair to expect two hon. Members, possibly even of the same party—I am sure they would not wish to be put in that situation—to make that kind of decision. If the matter became the responsibility of a planning inspector, the examination of the issues could be even more detailed. There would be a very cogent cross-examination of witnesses, and the Secretary of State could appoint independent assessors to assist the inspector. I do not know whether hon. Members are aware, but in Private Opposed Bill Committees hon. Members are hearing subjective evidence from both sides—from the objectors and from the promoters. We are not able to obtain the experts' objective advice, which is necessary if we are to reach a considered decision. If a local planning inquiry were taking place, it is likely that the local objectors would be able to attend it. They would not be expected to crowd into the small space that we allow the public to occupy in Private Opposed Bill Committees.

I have therefore been very much disturbed by such considerations. To add to my reservation about the procedure, there is the ridiculous requirement that attendance by members appointed to such a Committee is compulsory. Although I have tested "Erskine May" on penalties, I have not as yet incurred any of them. The requirement means that, whatever important business is taking place on the Floor of the House or elsewhere, an hon. Member who is placed on such a Committee cannot attend to it. The hon. Members involved are virtually tied to the Committee, spending weeks, or months in this instance, on a matter in which neither they nor their constituents have any interest.

If I and other Committee members considered that we had matters which were more important to attend to, we would be reported to the House and our names would appear on the Order Paper. Even if we were attending the Committee during that day, but we were absent for over an hour, we would be reported on the Order Paper the next day. That is a ridiculous pursuit.

Parliament must re-examine its procedures so that wealthy companies do not obtain planning permission by the back door through private Bill routes. They are able to obtain permission for their proposals without them receiving proper scrutiny. They bypass ministerial decisions on important matters of national policy. Neither should hon. Members' time be spent helping barristers to get richer at the expense of matters which directly affect their constituents, such as mine, in areas of low income, bad housing and high unemployment. Those are the main reasons why I resigned from the Committee. I did so in an attempt to focus attention on a need to reform the present outdated and potentially corrupt system.

8.23 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I thank the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) for her kind reference to my chairmanship of the Committee, but I cannot find it in my heart to agree with most of what she has had to say. It may well be true that the procedures of this House need to be examined and reviewed. I am sure there are hon. Members on both sides of the House who feel that there are many aspects of the House that should be looked into from time to time. However, that is not the matter before us tonight.

I shall address myself to the procedures of this House and the ability of right hon. and hon. Members to exercise unprejudiced judgments on behalf of the House. The latter is something which we are all asked to do on many occasions in many places on behalf of our colleagues on both sides of the House. I resent bitterly the innuendo that has been present in this Chamber tonight. It has been present on occasions in the Committee, and certainly we have heard it tonight in its most unpleasant and unacceptable form.

I say on behalf of myself and my colleagues who sit with me on the Committee—I believe I can say it, too, on behalf of the other members of this Committee—that I do not believe it is beyond the bounds of credibility to say that we can listen to the evidence and reach a balanced decision and judgment upon it. What we were asked to do was to act on behalf of this House.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: No one would question the integrity of hon. Members or question whether they could carry out that function. The question is whether our procedures will be seen to be fair by those outside the House and by those who lose as a result. That is a different matter. Members may not doubt the integrity of those who are members of the Committee but there are those outside who, if they lose, may feel that they have not had a fair deal, and that could be very damaging to democracy.

Mr. Thornton: I do not believe that there will be people outside this House who will refuse to accept that they have not had a very fair hearing, because they have. Certainly I think this will be borne out by the petitioners who appeared before our Committee. I do believe that there are many things said in this House which are not repeated outside, and I wish that some of the things that have been alleged in this Chamber tonight would be repeated outside. It would be interesting to see what happened to them there.

What we are being asked to do tonight is to recognise that, whatever may be the need for a long-term review of the procedure governing private Bills, the House has responsibility to those who come before it to discharge its duty with the best of expedition until the procedure is reviewed.

It is worth mentioning at this stage that the route which has been chosen on this occasion was not another option that they could have picked. We have been told that the private Bill route was the only one available in this instance, and if this House requires that procedure to be followed, it is incumbent upon the Members of this House to discharge their functions as best they may. It is not right that delay and excuses, however sincerely the hon. Lady might believe that she has done the right thing, should be used to frustrate the procedures of the House in this way.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are many occasions when our procedures are designed precisely to protect petitioners, and that many Opposition Members similarly wish to protect petitioners from time to time? It is because of the right of petition to this House, and the redress of grievance and the rest, that we have these procedures. They are precisely to protect those very people, because we want to make sure that they do not get a rotten deal.

Mr. Thornton: My hon. Friend is right to draw this to the attention of the House, because that is true.

The House has decided that the membership of the Committee should be two Members from either side of the House. It is not for me or for anyone sitting on the Government Benches to determine the way in which Opposition Members are appointed or the way in which the Opposition's usual channels operate. When I was asked whether I would agree to serve on the Committee, the time commitment was made perfectly clear. It was made clear to me also that the business would be pre-eminent and that the House would require me to give it priority over everything else that I was seeking to do. In accepting the invitation to serve on the Committee, I accepted those conditions.

It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Cynon Valley or any other hon. Member to use the conditions of membership as an excuse for not sitting on the Committee. It may be that she was not told of the conditions that would apply. It may be also that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) was not told either. However, that is a matter for them to take up with their own party channels. They do not have an excuse that can be used to frustrate the workings of the Committee.

Mr. Sayeed: I was told that a private Bill Committee takes precedence over other business of the House, but I should like it to be clear that I was conned into accepting membership of the Committee to a certain extent in that I was told that the Committee would sit for only two weeks.

Mr. Thornton: Perhaps we all thought that our time in Committee would be over far sooner than it has proved to be. However, we were aware that we were expected to make every effort to try to facilitate the swift progress of the Bill.

Statements have been made with the intention of casting a slur on myself and my colleagues. It is not good enough to say that they were not meant personally. The remarks have been of an extremely personal nature. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who has been mentioned this evening, has been the subject of some of these remarks. It would be strange if the Member in whose constituency the development was taking place did not mention the matter to some of his colleagues if he thought that it was good for his area. This was done in a perfectly proper fashion. It is incredible——

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Thornton: No. It is incredible——

Mr. Boyes: Yes, it is incredible. Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point? I ask him to give way, on the letter.

Mr. Thornton: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at the same time.

Mr. Boyes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thornton: No.

Mr. Boyes: That is because the hon. Gentleman dare not do so.

Mr. Thornton: The depths to which Opposition Members will sink is incredible.

Mr. Boyes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask for your advice. The hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) may or may not have received a letter from the former chairman of the Conservative party. This could be material to his position——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for the Chair?

Mr. Boyes: An important issue has arisen, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It appears that a number of Conservative Members received a letter from the previous chairman of the Conservative party——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. He is raising a point of argument and not a point of order.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton *rose*——

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) received a copy of the letter, he is not entitled to sit on the Committee.

Mr. Boyes: That is the point I am making.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: These are perfectly legitimate issues to raise in debate. They are not points of order for the Chair.

Mr. Thornton *rose*——

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: It is extremely important to seek your guidance on this matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the case that a member of the Committee has to declare whether he has any financial interest in the matters that are to be discussed? If the hon. Member for Crosby, who is currently the Chairman of the Committee, received a copy of the letter in question, by that token he should not be sitting on the Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the Selection Committee and not for the Chair.

Mr. Thornton: If Opposition Members had cared to remain seated for a few more minutes, they might have received the answers that they are seeking. They are so used to seeing things which really do not exist and to casting innuendo across the Chamber that they find it impossible to sit still long enough to listen to something which might answer some of their allegations.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, in the proper discharge of his constituency responsibilities on Second Reading——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: So we were right.

Mr. Thornton: I am certain that my right hon. Friend mentioned to a number of hon. Members, myself included —*[Interruption.]* That having happened, I was one of those present in the Chamber to support the Bill on Second Reading. Is it being suggested — *[Interruption.]* Do Opposition Members want to hear what I am saying or do they not?

Mr. Eric Heffer: I do, because I shall report it back to Liverpool.

Mr. Thornton: If the hon. Gentleman will be quiet for a moment he may learn even more that he can take back to Liverpool. In common with many other hon. Members, I supported the Bill on its Second Reading. Does that mean that anyone who gave that support to the Bill is precluded from serving as a member of the Committee? I cannot believe that that is so.

It has been alleged — this led to some rather disagreeable exchanges in Committee — that the company in question made donations to the Conservative party and that that compromised it and myself and my hon. Friends who were serving on the Committee. The question was asked of the chairman of the company, who answered it honestly and openly in Committee.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the issue of donations arose from a question that I asked in Committee? There was no statement. I asked the witness a question.

Mr. Thornton: Yes.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Withdraw.

Mr. Thornton: The hon. Member for Cynon Valley asked the question and the question was answered. The chairman of the company agreed to produce the figures to the Committee the following day, which he did. An exchange took place arising from a line of questioning by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central. Exception was taken by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley to something that was said during that line of questioning. It seemed to me that her reaction went over the top.

The way in which this debate has been conducted brings nothing but discredit upon the procedures of this House —*[Interruption.]* I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Opposition's false hilarity disguises the fact that there is no substance in their allegations. It is deplorable if all hon. Members are to be subjected to allegations of this kind when they are involved in the procedures of this House.

I am not at all happy about the fact that this procedure is being brought before the House. It is wrong that the Committee should be forced to sit with a quorum that is less than that which the House originally decreed that it preferred. Neither I nor any of my hon. Friends have sought or caused this failure. Those Opposition Members who are responsible for it should examine their consciences.

8.31 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The changing of the Committee's quorum means that we are considering a very wide principle. It is also a fundamental democratic principle. This matter has to be examined with great care. If the quorum is changed on this occasion, many hon. Members will feel that a great deal of private business ought also to be dealt with by objection. It is no secret that for a very long time I have been dissatisfied with the private procedures of this House. Instead of trying to adjust those procedures, I suggest that it would be far better to have a wide inquiry into the whole question.

If the quorum is reduced to two, it will result in an absolute farce. At the end of the Committee's deliberations a vote may have to be taken. There will be only two Committee members. If one of those members votes one way and the other member votes the other way, the Chairman will have to use his casting vote — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) will not need to attend the Committee's proceedings; if he disagrees with the Chairman, in the end the Chairman will have two votes. The hon. Member has only one vote. This would result in a complete farce. By changing the quorum on this occasion we are giving a judicial function to one Member of this House.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill could follow any other than the private Bill procedure. If the Labour party had not opted out, the Chairman would be unable to exercise his casting vote. There may be a three-to-one vote at the end of the Committee's proceedings. It is necessary to come to the House for a change in the procedure because the Labour party has opted out.

Mr. Bennett: That is not quite correct. If four Committee members were present and they divided two and two, the Chairman would still have the casting vote. The Chairman's power is considerable. We are being

[Mr. Bennett]

asked to approve a procedure that reduces the quorum to two. I suggest that this could lead to one member of the Committee reaching a decision. That is unsatisfactory.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Bennett: No.

I accept that it is grossly unfair of the Opposition to suggest that because the company had made a considerable contribution to Tory party funds the judgment of the hon. Member for Bristol, East would be affected. However, I refer him to the speech of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) who compared the Committee's function to that of a jury. Could anybody who had received a sum of money either from the accused or from somebody who was involved with the prosecution sit on a jury? However much his integrity might be supported, other people could not and should not be asked to believe in it. If people are acting in a judicial capacity they have to be seen to be absolutely impartial.

The problem in a democracy is to gain the consent not of the majority but of those who do not approve of what the Government are doing. People have to be persuaded that things that they do not like are fair and just. That is a very real problem. How do we persuade somebody that it is right to build a nuclear power station at the bottom of his garden, or that a Channel tunnel marshalling yard should be placed outside his back door? How do we persuade people that they must put up with large numbers of container lorries going past their doors, day after day, night after night? How do we persuade people that mud flats which are the natural habitat of many birds should be destroyed? It is difficult to find the right balance between the rights of the individual and the good of the country, or the good of a company or its profits. We do not have to convince those who win the case that the procedure is fair and just. We have to convince those who lose the case that it is fair and just and that they should put up with something because it is in the national interest.

There are two procedures for making objections. For a long time the only procedure was the private Bill, but since the 1940s the public inquiry procedure has been introduced. The hon. Member for Bristol, East suggested that the public inquiry procedure was not available in this instance. I suggest that it is. After a planning application has been made and a decision reached, it might be necessary to ask for a private Bill to put into effect the result of the planning application. The objectors would be less likely to feel aggrieved if they were able to make objections at a public inquiry and if they were also able to take advantage of parliamentary procedures. They have every right to feel aggrieved at not being allowed to opt for the public inquiry procedure and this type of Bill. The problem for the promoters and the Government is to convince those who object that they have had a fair hearing. Even those who have petitioned against the measure in Committee have not felt that. They make no criticism of the Chair, but they do not feel that the procedures are fair.

The promoters can use their money to employ experts to deploy their case. Groups such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Ramblers Association do not have those resources. They are extremely good pressure groups, and have people who have learnt parliamentary procedures carefully going through private Bills. However, most members of the general public do not understand the procedure for introducing a petition or how to make it comply with legal requirements within the required time scale. They have considerable difficulties with the procedure.

The Private Bill Office is extremely good at advising individuals how to do that, and I pay tribute to it. In reality, as the Private Bill Office often points out, if one wants to do a good job, one should get parliamentary agents to do it. That is expensive, and the majority of people cannot afford it. On the other hand, at a public inquiry one can make one's objections. Normally, if one appears on the first day of an inquiry and makes it clear to the inspector that one wants to be heard, one will have that opportunity. It is important to ensure that those who will be dissatisfied with a decision should at least have the satisfaction of making their objections.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): As I was a Minister with responsibility for planning for many years, I have sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comments. However, how does it help those who want their case to be heard by a Committee if some members of that Committee remove themselves from the hearing?

Mr. Bennett: I was not arguing that that helps such people. This case shows that the procedure is not working. It has produced complete dissatisfaction. It no longer matters how the Committee proceeds, because people outside do not feel that they have had a just hearing. If the two Labour Members continue to sit on the Committee, and if the Chairman, with his casting vote, and his colleagues carry the day, it will be felt that justice has not been done.

Mr. Cash: Regarding the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths), are not hon. Members incurring unreasonable cost for the petitioners by refusing to participate in the proceedings? Is not that a reason why they should resume their responsibilities? Why is it that the other hon. Members who have been nominated to the Committee have refused to take part in the proceedings? If they have refused because this is nothing more or less than a Labour plot to frustrate the proceedings, is that not a contempt?

Mr. Bennett: That is an interesting argument. The hon. Gentleman is obviously in conflict with most Conservative Members, who have sought to tell the House that even if only two hon. Members are present, they will be so fair and unbiased that all objectors will have a fair hearing. If the hon. Gentleman suggests that Tory Members will be not influenced by the fact that the Tory party has received money from the company, he is making the same allegation that the Labour party was proposing. I doubt whether that is his hon. Friend's argument.

We must consider our procedures carefully to ensure that people who object feel that they are getting a fair deal. We must do so urgently, because although there have been some objectors to this Bill, we shall soon have a similar procedure on the Channel tunnel, and far more people will present petitions against it. There are differences. For example, the Channel tunnel Bill will be a hybrid Bill, and both the Government and this type of Committee will be involved.

One of the problems will relate to how long the Committee will sit. The hon. Member for Crosby (Mr.

Thornton) said that he may have been a little misled about how long their Committee would sit, and I suspect that he misled the other members of the Committee about how frequently they needed to sit. Nothing is laid down in Standing Orders about how frequently a Committee needs to sit. It may use its discretion. If a Committee decides to sit only once a month, the Chairman of Ways and Means may seek a direction from the House that it sit more frequently.

However, the need to sit three days a week through prime time in the House is not required. That is a custom and practice which has developed, but the Committee is not bound by it. Often a Chairman and hon. Members decide that it may be more convenient to sit on a Monday evening rather than on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. The trouble is that parliamentary agents have tended to ask for the sittings to take place for their convenience because of the problem of instructing and paying for counsel to represent them. There has been an erosion of power. The Chairman said that he had been told that he had to give the Bill priority, which suggests that the Government Whips gave him the impression that he did not have as much choice in the matter as he has.

Mr. Thornton: I wish to clarify the hon. Gentleman's point. Any discussions that I had were not with the Whips, but followed a talk with the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, and, subsequently, were with the Private Bill Office. I endorse his point that the Private Bill Office provides tremendous support for our endeavours. In no way did I mislead the Committee. We discussed a sittings motion informally, and agreed to expedite the business, as is the custom and practice of the House. Subsequently, arising from the obvious difficulties that sitting for three days a week creates for hon. Members, we agreed to vary the sittings of the Committee to facilitate hon. Members attending Question Time in the Chamber. I certainly did not seek to mislead the Committee, nor do I think that any member of the Committee would claim that he or she had been misled.

Mr. Bennett: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's comments.

There will be considerable difficulties about how often the Committee on the Channel tunnel sits. Hon. Members are often accused of filibustering on Bills. The problem with the Channel tunnel measure will relate to the length of time to which petitioners will be entitled. Indeed, how much time are the petitioners and promoters entitled to take on this Bill? Hon. Members who land on the Channel tunnel Bill, whether because someone puts an arm around their shoulder and encourages them or for another reason, must consider carefully the time implications for them and how far they should give priority to such a Bill over all their other duties in representing their constituents. I suggest that there will be some problems, especially with respect to petitioners. At present, any person is entitled to submit a petition. An objection can be made and the petition goes to the Examiners of Petitions. Once a petition has been accepted as valid, the petitioners have a right to be heard before the Committee.

I suggest that this measure has considerable implications for the Channel tunnel legislation. There is a growing feeling that the proceedings on private Member's Bills take too long, that the promoters develop their case at too great a length and that sometimes, although not often, petitioners take a long time to present their arguments. I suggest that the House should quickly look at this aspect.

Instead of considering whether to change the quorum, would it not be in the best interests of the House to look carefully at the procedures for private Member's Bills? If the motion is passed, some Labour Members may want to question whether private business should continue to operate in its present form. Ninety per cent. of private business is unopposed. If people feel that an issue has become party political and that the procedure has not been particularly fair, the temptation will be to object to more private business. In that case, we shall return to the position last century when there was a great deal of horse trading on private Members' Bills and the Committee debates were only a minor part of the proceedings, the work being done in negotiations outside the Committee between the petitioners and the promoters. Most of the work was done across the Floor of the House and different groups of Members were persuaded to support different interests.

I caution the House that, if it alters one small part of the proceedings, the temptation will be for other people to look carefully at the private Members' Bill procedure and perhaps to increase the flow of objections to that legislation on the grounds that the procedure needs to be urgently reformed. Is it a good idea to change the quorum on the Committee? Would it not be better at this point to initiate urgently an inquiry into the procedure with respect to totally private Bills and hybrid Bills, so that we can ensure that people feel, especially if they lose, that they have had a fair and just hearing?

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Government seek tonight to force this issue by asking their supporters to vote for the motion, that would be a first-class disgrace, bearing in mind that the company involved paid £60,000 into the Conservative party coffers at the last election?

Mr. Bennett: That is a fair point, but we should be a little careful. Let us remember that the motion is tabled on behalf of the Chairman of Ways and Means. He is acting as the servant of the House. He is proposing a way out. I suggest that that is not a satisfactory way out and that we need a far-reaching and quick inquiry into procedure.

I think that, at the end of the debate, many hon. Members will not want to vote against a motion in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means. We do not have to come to a vote. It would be possible for the Chairman of Ways and Means to consider withdrawing the motion so that there can be further discussion on the matter and we can decide whether to reform the procedures. It might even be possible to ascertain whether an hon. Member can be persuaded to proceed with the Bill. That would be another way to avoid the quorum difficulty. There are a few possible alternatives. It will be unsatisfactory if the Government decide to move the closure motion and push hon. Members to a vote. It will mean that we have a short-term solution which will produce further long-term aggravation for the House and all those people who have a just right to object to the legislation.

8.55 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Fifty-two Labour Members have signed a motion calling for the

[Mr. Jonathan Sayeed]

quorum on the Bill to remain at three. I wish that that were possible, but it is not. To understand why it is not possible, it is necessary to detail the chronology. It is necessary in passing to understand the lack of competence of the Labour Whips office. It is necessary to note that the genesis of the opposition to the motion in the name of the Chairman of Ways and Means comes from people who are determined only to accept ru'es which they like, while ignoring or subverting rules with which they disagree.

Many of the 52 Labour Members are not willing to submit to the rules of the House. They are not willing to test their dislike of the private Members' Bill procedure democratically. They are attempting to subvert the will of the House by ignoring its rules and by making its procedures unworkable. I believe that the House will not and should not permit them to do so.

If any Labour Members think that I am being unfair to any of the hon. Members who signed the motion, I make them an offer: I shall unreservedly withdraw my remarks, providing that just one of the 52 Members agrees to join my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) and myself on the Committee. That Member must make the proviso that he will read the evidence that has come before the Committee and agree to attend faithfully every meeting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby and I have done. I do not hear any great shouts. I suppose that that lack of offers shouts for itself. Not one of those 52 signatories is prepared to serve on the Committee because those hon. Members do not like the procedure. They want to undermine the procedures of the House.

I accept that it was suggested to me that consideration of the Bill would take only two weeks. I regret to say that it has taken a great deal longer, but I have attended the Committee's meetings every time, and I shall continue to do so.

The Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill Committee was formed on 13 November. When it was formed every member of the Committee was told, in no uncertain terms, that that Committee took precedence over other business in the House. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) was aware of that. The hon. Lady raised the matter of her sponsorship by the Transport and General Workers Union and asked whether that represented a conflict of interest. She was assured that there was no conflict of interest. Until that time it was open to her to refuse to serve on the Committee—she did not do so.

Mrs. Clwyd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I wish to point out to him that in the past it has not been possible to refuse to serve on this type of Committee. When I refused to serve on the Committee — by permission of the Chairman of Ways and Means, who accepted that I had absented myself from the Committee permanently — that created a precedent. The hon. Gentleman should get his facts straight.

Mr. Sayeed: I am glad to answer that point. I checked with the Private Bill Office whether it was open to a member of that Committee — before Committee proceedings had begun and they had agreed to serve on that Committee—to withdraw. The answer was yes. The hon. Lady either did not know this or chose to ignore it.

Mr. Cash: Would my hon. Friend not agree that it was open to the hon. Lady to have sought an excuse to withdraw from the Committee? Would it not be right for the hon. Lady to tell the House whether she did seek to be excused? Did the other members who were asked whether they would attend that Committee but refused do so as prescribed under Standing Order No. 117?

Mr. Sayeed: I do not recall the hon. Lady requesting permission not to serve at the beginning of proceedings. She may have mentioned this to someone else but she certainly did not mention it to me or in my hearing.

The hon. Lady mentioned her belief that her sponsorship by the Transport and General Workers Union may have been considered a conflict of interest. She was assured on that point by the Private Bill Office Clerks.

The sittings motion was agreed unanimously as stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby. It is true that it was later amended at the request of both Labour Members of the Committee. It was amended to assist the Labour Members and such assistance was consistently shown by my hon. Friend as Chairman throughout the 14 days. On 10 December, almost a month after the Committee was formed, the Gas Bill had its Second Reading, and a day later a Committee was formed. The hon. Lady, despite membership of the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill Committee, asked to go on the Gas Bill.

Mrs. Clwyd: The hon. Gentleman is confused.

Mr. Sayeed: In front of witnesses, the hon. Lady asked to be allowed to go on the Gas Bill Committee. This was despite the fact that she ignored the fact that her prior duty was to the Private Bill Committee. This was the first instance of the incompetence of the Labour Whips for they should have known that it was impossible for the hon. Lady to serve on both Committees.

Mr. Sedgemore: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member, unless I have misheard, appears to be repeating a private conversation that he alleges to have had with my hon. Friend in this House. I thought it was a convention that private conversations were not mentioned in this Chamber but if that were the case this House would be in terrible, terrible trouble.

Mr. Speaker: I think it would be unwise to repeat private conversations.

Mr. Sayeed: I was not aware of that convention, Mr. Speaker. I would not, of course, wish to go against any convention of the House, so I apologise to the hon. Lady.

Hon. Members: And withdraw it.

Mr. Sayeed: And I will withdraw it as well.

Hon. Members: Exactly.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Lady was put on the Gas Bill Committee by the Labour Whips and it was an example of their extraordinary incompetence. The hon. Lady was already on a Bill to which she owed a prior duty. The most charitable assumption we can make as to why the Labour Whips put the hon. Lady on the Gas Bill Committee was that they were grateful for one more willing body prepared to serve on it. They forgot, however, that she had a prior duty to a Private Bill Committee. Even before the Gas Bill Committee sat, the hon. Lady's attendance was dilatory. After it started to sit, it was derisory.

On 22 January, after we had sat for 14 days and cost the promoters and petitioners some £1·25 million, the hon. Lady, on one of her rare appearances, started to ask

questions about political donations. That line of questioning was not germane, but my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby, in his normal generous way, allowed it to proceed. The hon. Lady then seized on a slightly loose answer from the chairman of the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company to suggest that her honour and integrity were impugned. Any person who was not determined to find any excuse to avoid their responsibilities, and any reasonable person who read the transcript, would realise that the only people who could conceivably have grounds to believe that their integrity was being attacked by that line of questioning were my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby and myself.

The hon. Lady's excuses for leaving the Committee were spurious. I believe her action to have been a deliberate, major and sustained contempt of the House, and I hope that the House will deal with it. A series of meetings followed. I expressed a strong preference for the Committee's membership remaining at four, with a quorum of three, but I said that I believed that the Labour Whips should stipulate that any person willing to join the Committee must find the time to read the transcripts for the 14 previous days and be willing to take part in all future proceedings.

Mr. Sedgemore: The hon. Gentleman has gone power mad.

Mr. Sayeed: I understand that the Labour Whips Office proposed the hon. Member for Dursley——

Mr. Terry Lewis: He cannot even get my constituency right.

Mr. Sayeed: —without even asking him. No doubt that assured that the hon. Gentleman had sufficient excuse for not agreeing to serve. The Labour Whips crowned their incompetence by being unable to find, from all the ranks of the Labour party, a second member of that party to serve on the Committee so that we could have a Committee of four and retain a quorum of three.

Mr. Lewis: Perhaps I could correct the hon. Gentleman. My constituency is Worsley, not whatever he called it. I received a letter from the Private Bill Office saying that there had already been 14 sittings. With the letter came a certificate which I was supposed to sign and which the hon. Gentleman had already signed. On it, I was asked to declare that I would not vote on any evidence that I had not heard or about any meeting that I had not attended. That is the most ludicrous thing among many ludicrous things that I have been asked to do in my few years in the House. I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman could understand that fundamental problem.

Mr. Sayeed: I understand the hon. Gentleman's objections to serving on the Committee. I was not blaming him for not wishing to serve on the Committee, although it was open to him to read the transcript. His hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley would have been unable to vote at any time had she remained on the Committee as she has not been in touch with what was happening even though she had consistently read the transcripts for all the meetings which she did not attend. Despite all efforts, the Labour party has not been able to put one more hon. Member forward to serve on the Committee, which now numbers three.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not so much a question of the Labour party not being enthusiastic about serving on the Committee, as that the Labour party is deliberately ensuring that no one serves on the Committee? Furthermore, the Labour party's actions in this matter are similar to those that it is employing in other parts of the country and in relation to the debate on Friday, the object of which is to ensure that the ordinary democratic procedures of the House and elsewhere are not followed through.

Mr. Sayeed: I understand my hon. Friend's points about what is coming up on Friday. However, I do not think that the Labour party is intelligent enough to be that Machiavellian. I believe that the Labour party simply could not find anybody else to serve on the Committee. As a consequence, there will be only three hon. Members on the Committee. There needs to be a buffer of an extra person over the number for a quorum. It is therefore essential that there is a quorum of only two. As a famous right hon. Lady says, there is no alternative.

9.12 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): We have had a very interesting debate and I am glad to see that the issues of private Bills have generated so much interest throughout the House. It must be a rare occasion to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the chairman of the Conservative party and the former chairman of the Conservative party, the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, present during a debate. That degree of interest in private Bills is very welcome and I hope that it will lead to a more general discussion of some of the issues that have been raised.

Before I move on to the major themes which I consider to be important, I should like to pick up two points made by hon. Members who are also members of the this private Bill Committee.

The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) said that if an hon. Member did not want to serve on an opposed private Bill Committee, that hon. Member had a right to opt out. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Standing Orders of the House in relation to private business and particularly Nos. 115 and 116. If the hon. Gentleman reads those orders, he will see that an hon. Member does not have the right to opt out in the way to which he referred. Standing Order No. 116 states:

> "The Committee of Selection shall report to the House the name of every member from whom it has not received within a reasonable time such declaration as is mentioned in the last preceding order, filled up and signed as therein mentioned, or, in lieu thereof, an excuse which it deems sufficient."

In other words, if I or my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) wanted to opt out of the Committee we would have to find a reasonable excuse along the lines referred to in the Standing Order and not, as the hon. Member for Bristol, East said, simply walk out of the Committee.

My next point relates to the contribution from the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton). The hon. Gentleman said—he may well have made an injudicious use of words and I apologise for picking him up—that there were allegations——

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fatchett: I will not give way but I hope that the advice that he is getting is better than some of the other advice that is around.

The hon. Member for Crosby said that, during the proceedings of the opposed private Bill Committee, allegations were made about the behaviour of the Felixstowe Dock company or European Ferries in relation to donations to the Conservative party. I do not wish to pursue that point in any detail because one or two of my hon. Friends have already referred to it. I hope that hon. Members will regret their decision not to support my private Member's Bill last year which was designed to give ballots to company shareholders. If there had been a ballot of European Ferries' shareholders, its donations to the Conservative party might have had greater legitimacy.

Mr. Sedgemore: My hon. Friend says that he does not want to go into the subject of the £60,000 given to the Conservative party in 1983 and £33,000 given in 1984, but does he agree that Mr. Parker, who is sitting up there, made serious accusations against my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) which were so disgraceful that he should withdraw?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend mentions the point that I was about to make. There were no allegations made against the company, although that issue has been mentioned this evening. The only allegations made during the proceedings were made by the company and its representative against my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley.

I shall quote what the company's representative said because it is important. It is included in a transcript of the proceedings on 22 January this year. The House may be interested in the background to the series of questions that I asked. My hon. Friend had asked how much the company donated to the Conservative party, but my inquiring mind led me in another direction. I wanted to know why companies donated to the Conservative party because it may not be a sensible investment at the moment. For the benefit of research and information, I wanted that company chairman to give me some detailed answers as to why a company makes such a political donation without reference to its shareholders. I received some interesting answers.

I told Mr. Parker that the criticism made of such donations was that they might provide access to the Conservative party, and through that, access to the wheels of decision-making in the House. I put that criticism because I understand that people sometimes make it about the Conservative party. I always try to defend the Conservative party and say that I have never met a Conservative Member who would be tainted in any way by any business interests. The only allegation made was made by Mr. Parker. He said:

> "I suspect the reverse is true of people who contribute to your party"—

in other words, the Labour party—

> "like the Transport and General Workers, might also expect you to take a view of their case".

Only one possible construction can be put on those words. I have looked for an alternative construction because I realise that under the pressure of the detailed cross-examination to which I was subjecting Mr. Parker the words he used may not have been thought about with great care. I have looked to see whether there is another possible interpretation. There is not. The only interpretation possible is that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley will take a view of the case consistent with the policy of the Transport and General Workers Union, because she is sponsored by that union.

Mr. Boyes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may not be aware that my son is a football referee. As a football referee, he is not allowed only to expel footballers from the field for dirty play; he is allowed to expel spectators if they are causing a nuisance. Mr. Parker, the man who insulted my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), is in the Box in the Chamber. Have you the power——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that we do not refer to people in the Strangers Gallery. They are, indeed, invisible.

Mr. Boyes: He is not in the Strangers Gallery. He is down here with us.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Already there has been a request that the said Mr. Parker, who is listening intently to the debate——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Again, he is not.

Mr. Hoyle: I always accept guidance from you, Mr. Speaker. I did not quite catch what you said.

Mr. Speaker: I said that he is invisible.

Mr. Hoyle: Would you not think, Mr. Speaker, that the invisible Mr. Parker might have the decency tomorrow —being invisible tonight—to withdraw those offensive remarks that he made to a very honourable Member of whom Opposition Members are all very proud?

Mr. Fatchett: I do not think it is as simple as my hon. Friend makes it out to be. If the person to whom reference has been made were to make an apology to my hon. Friend that would be appropriate. I should have thought that any decent person would do that.

There is a deeper argument which I hope my hon. Friends will recognise. It is not just a question of an apology for comments that may have been made loosely; it is question of those comments vitiating the whole character of the Committee. What Mr. Parker said at that stage raises questions about the impartiality of any member of that Committee who is sponsored by a trade union.

Mr. Thornton: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the exchange, which he rightly says he took up with Mr. Parker after the initial question by the hon. Lady, was discussed by us at length? Does he not agree also that it was suggested that the exchange took place in, I shall not say lighthearted, but a good-tempered manner? He himself admitted that. Does he also not agree that when Mr. Parker was referring subsequently to the Transport and General Workers Union——

Mr. Sedgemore: Why does he not defend himself?

Mr. Thornton: Because he cannot defend himself from an attack that is being made in the House.

Does the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) agree that the Transport and General Workers Union had already given evidence to the Committee on behalf of the branch in Felixstowe, expressing support for the Bill? Does he not agree that it was the only trade union

that had been mentioned and that it was an illustration — no more and no less — from an implied remark? Certainly it was implicit in the remarks that had been made that the company, and therefore Mr. Parker, might have been influenced in another way. He was merely saying that perhaps the converse was true. If the hon. Gentleman is honest about it, he will agree that we discussed the matter and felt that there had been no imputation which Mr. Parker could say the following day had not been intended and was not there.

Mr. Fatchett: In his final comments about what may have been seen as an allegation by myself about Conservative party donations the hon. Gentleman said that the converse may be true. Surely if the converse is true in this case it means that if my initial criticism is accepted, a person sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union must be influenced by that sponsorship and must therefore be expected to support the national policy of that union, which is rightly to object to the extension of Felixstowe docks.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): That is a subjective judgment.

Mr. Fatchett: I shall now come to that point.

This evening's argument is that the Committee is expected to serve in a quasi-judicial role. I argue that the comments made by Mr. Parker against my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley vitiate that quasi-judicial role and raise serious questions about the future of the Committee. Further than that, I challenge the whole argument that it is possible for hon. Members to serve on a Committee in what is seen as a quasi-judicial role.

I am not for a moment saying that hon. Members will not act with integrity, common sense or decency. However, a judicial or quasi-judicial role presupposes that political considerations will not be present and will not obtain in the activities of the Committee's procedures. That cannot be the case on a private Bill such as this. To make the argument time and again, as Conservative Members have done this evening, that one can operate in a vacuum without any outside political influence when in a quasi-judicial role is nonsense, and does not bear any examination.

To prove my point, let us look at two sectors that are crucial to the Bill. The first is the expansion of Felixstowe docks and the implication of that expansion for docks in other parts of the country. I refer to docks in Southampton, London and on the west coast, including Liverpool and Bristol. For all of those there will be employment consequences if the Bill goes through, because there will be job losses.

We are told that the Government and the Secretary of State for Transport have no view on the development of port policy. We were told at one stage that what was good for Felixstowe was good for the country. I do not share that view—my political judgment is different. The country needs a dock policy that will ensure good use of resources and capital, and security of employment. How can I approach this matter in Committee without bringing my political prejudices into my answers to the questions raised by the Bill? It is impossible. I cannot be devoid of my political views, and my views on the world and how it should be organised.

That is also true of the second crucial issue, which is whether the company should have the right given to it by Parliament, if we approve the Bill, to encroach into an area of outstanding natural beauty. We cannot approach such a matter without some political consideration. I support the environmentalist argument and recognise that environmental groups have been pressurised and have lost valuable resources. One of the key factors in the development of the country over the next two decades is how we relate to the green and ecological issues. How can I, with that perception, operate in a quasi-judicial way, when I bring into the procedures some political conceptions which some Conservative Members would think are political misconceptions? Whatever they are, they are political.

The Tory argument against my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley withdrawing from the Committee is that she has not just let the side down, but moved away from the quasi-judicial role. I am not into arguments about letting the side down. It is about time that this club was changed and the basis of legislation was made more democratic. The argument about letting the side down should be dropped once and for all. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley has been criticised because she will not play a quasi-judicial role. I do not believe that she can do that. I do not believe that the House and its procedures believe that it is possible for that role to be played. Why does the House and its Committee of Selection appoint four members?

Mr. Cash: The hon. Member does not like democracy.

Mr. Fatchett: I will resist the hon. Gentleman. With his party's record of resisting any advance in democracy for the people in this country, we do not want lessons about democracy from him.

The Committee of Selection appoints a committee of four — two members from the Conservative party and two from the Labour party. Why do we appoint people from different political parties? The reason is not that we believe that they are operating in a judicial role but because we accept the argument and the thesis put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) in his earlier contribution. My hon. Friend said that it is crucial that minorities outside the House have confidence in our procedures and institutions. That is why we appoint two members from the Labour party and two from the Conservative party. We are playing a political role in a political institution.

What will happen if we pass the motion tonight? By agreeing to a quorum of two we are implying that the Committee will have a membership of no more than three in the future. That will shake confidence in the proceedings of the Committee outside the House and it will question the public's confidence about the procedure in the future. We should bear that in mind before we go through the Lobby tonight. The last time a quorum was reduced was in July 1965. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish has obviously been studying the history, and I understand that the reason was that there was no time left in the parliamentary Session to find an alternative person to sit on the Committee. Incidentally, the person was discharged because of illness. There was no argument, question or a debate. If we pass the motion tonight we shall challenge the confidence in that Committee and the quorum will be biased against the Labour party by two to one, whatever the argument.

I want to make two final contributions. I have always said that I would serve on the Committee but I have also

[Mr. Fatchett]

always said that I would serve on a Committee in which the balance was two Labour members and two Conservative members. I am not prepared to serve on a Committee in which there will not be a parity between the two political parties. My earlier argument gives my reasons for that. I do not see any justification in providing legitimacy or some specious confidence for a Committee which is impaired in the way in which I think that Committee will be. I therefore give notice that unless an additional Labour member is found it is not my intention to serve on the Committee.

Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, I have read the sanctions that can be imposed upon hon. Members. I am not looking forward to the process of spending some of the summer in the Tower of London or under Big Ben, which I understand is the greatest sanction which can be imposed upon us. I shall probably become like many of my constituents when they are unable to get employment—a clock watcher rather than a useful Member of Parliament. Whatever happens, I think it would show the stupidity of the procedures. In the debate tonight we have opened up not just the debate about a bad Bill which is against the country's interest and should be opposed; we have opened up and questioned the procedures.

I hope that the House will have the common sense and responsibility to question its procedures, to modernise those procedures and ensure that we do not have a back door route to legislation and to the securing and fostering of particular financial interests. We must stop that and ensure that we have a modern Parliament with modern procedures and no more of this nonsense.

9.35 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Since I had the honour to present this Bill to the House on Second Reading, I wish to make it absolutely clear that I have no interest in this Bill nor in the port.

Hon. Members may feel that I have been less than diligent on behalf of my party, but until the matter was raised by Opposition Members I did not know that the Felixstowe Dock and Harbour Company was a contributor to my party's funds. I admit that it might have been wiser for me to have discovered that, but I had no such knowledge when I presented the Bill.

It is fair to tell the House that when, as a Suffolk Member, I considered the case for a Suffolk port, I consulted my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) who represents the area involved. As one who has had the privilege, as others have had, of presenting a number of Bills, I was anxious that the Member of Parliament involved should back the proposal.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will not think me churlish, but far from giving it the vigorous public backing that I wanted, he hung back because he thought that it would be wrong for a member of the Government, especially the chairman of the party, to adopt a public position on such a Bill. It is only right that I should put that firmly on the record.

Everyone has a great deal of sympathy and understanding for those of our colleagues who are asked to spend a great deal of time, which could be devoted to other matters, stuck in a private Bill Committee. When I first entered the House, I, too, was conned. I was put on a private Bill Committee where I spent some 12 weeks, when I would have vastly preferred to have been in the Chamber.

However, I learnt something from two rather distinguished Labour Members who had been Chairmen of Committees for many years. They made it plain that I was expected to be in Committee on time, to be there all of the time and to listen to everything that was said. They insisted that Members of Parliament were acting on behalf of this House as a whole, so it was their absolute duty to form an objective view on the evidence put before them. I learnt from those distinguished Labour Chairmen that that was the best way to proceed.

It appears that in respect of the Bill and the discussion, the precepts of those distinguished Labour Members have not been followed. I understand the difficulties encountered by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), and do not complain about that aspect. Perhaps the debate, bad tempered and ragged as it has been, may well lead to a measure of reform. However, at the moment we are using the existing procedure, and whether it should be reformed is not the question before us. That question is only whether we should back the judgment of the Chairman of Ways and Means.

Hon. Members, especially Opposition Members, will join me in paying tribute to the present Chairman who has an immensely difficult task, but who, over many years, has given immeasurable service to the House. The issue is whether the Chairman of Ways and Means has arrived at the right decision in the circumstances.

When the House gave the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill a Second Reading, it laid a duty upon the Chairman of Ways and Means to ensure that the Bill would be considered in Committee under the procedures laid down by the House. It was for him to ensure that the promoters had a fair and proper hearing and that the petitioners were equally fairly heard.

The Chairman sought to do his duty by arranging for a Committee to meet. The Committee of Selection did its full duty by providing that hon. Members were available to perform that duty. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to proceed along the lines that have been traditional in the House for some time. The Chairman of Ways and Means, being prevented by circumstances from fulfilling the duty laid upon him by the House, had to take a different view. I am advised that he could have proceeded in one of two ways. In broad terms, he could have sought to discipline hon. Members who were not prepared to attend. We have moved a long way and it would have been exceedingly difficult and unpleasant if he had proceeded in that direction.

In some respects I regret that Parliament has progressed and that that sanction is no longer available to us. However, the Chairman of Ways and Means had to consider reducing the quorum. I do not regard that with any enthusiasm. If the motion had been to reduce the quorum to two members in all future private Bills Committees, I should have opposed it, because that is a major step. A Committee of the House would wish to examine procedural changes of that type with the greatest care before making any decision.

The Chairman had to decide. His decision is that the quorum should be as few as two members. That does not require that the Bill should proceed with only two members. Four members is the correct number, and if the Opposition were prepared to find those two members, they

would join the Committee and it would proceed with the proper number. Unfortunately, that decision cannot rest with the Chairman of Ways and Means. He can invite hon. Members to join the Committee, but he cannot make them attend. That is a practical fact that the Chairman must face.

The motion before the House arises from the position in which the Chairman of Ways and Means found himself. We are not here tonight to decide the merits of the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill or the political judgment of hon. Members who may sit on that Bill. We must decide whether the House backs the Chairman of Ways and Means in his judgment. That is the only issue on which we have to decide.

9.43 pm

The Chairman of Ways and Means: I believe that the House expects me to respond to some of the points raised during the debate. I shall try to do so briefly.

I begin with a confession. When I entered the House a little more than 20 years ago, I was a beneficiary of much of the wisdom and advice of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton). No doubt it is due to his benign influence that I managed to avoid all contact with private Bill Committees until I reached my present position.

We have had a valuable debate. In all the years that I have just mentioned, this is the first time that we have had such a debate about private Bills.

When the House gave me the duties that I now undertake I immediately became involved in and concerned about some of the issues that have been raised in the debate.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) talked about the need to modernise our procedures. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), in a contradictory statement, said that we needed an in-depth review to be done quickly. He cannot have it both ways. The hon. Member for Fife, Central talked about the need for a long, hard look. I believe that we need that long, hard look.

The House may be reassured to hear that I have recently taken some exploratory steps to see whether we can carry out a review of the private Bill procedure, the extent to which it is necessary and how such a review could be carried out. Obviously, a number of consultations will be necessary. People outside the House are involved, and the procedure in Scotland is different.

It is also important that we do not carry out a review as a knee-jerk reaction to a particular set of circumstances; we must do it in a proper, organised way. The House will recognise the need for such a review and I hope that hon. Members will be pleased that we have initiated it.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central, echoed by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), spoke about the obligation to attend a private Bill Committee. He said that they were the only Committees where attendance was compulsory and said that a defaulting member may be fined. The fact that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley is not serving on the Committee is a sign of the absence of compulsion. There are provisions in our Standing Orders, but they have to be acted on by the House. It would be for the House to decide whether, in the light of circumstances, disciplinary action—if that is the right expression—would be appropriate. We must examine how we induce hon. Members to serve on Committees. I do not believe that we ought to resort to compulsion and I do not believe that the House would support a motion to compel hon. Members to serve on a Committee.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish suggested that I should withdraw the motion to allow time for further discussion, and he pleaded for the normal quorum to be retained, as did other hon. Members. However, the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) was right to point out that the passing of the motion would not inhibit the Committee from proceeding with its full membership and with the normal quorum.

I understand that the Committee of Selection has gone to considerable pains to try to obtain the services of other hon. Members to serve on the Committee. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central recognised that he is still a member of the Committee and he is willing to serve in the qualified way that he explained. The hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) is also a member of the Committee. The membership exists; all that is necessary is for good will to apply and for the procedures of the House to be made effective. My motion would merely provide a long stop.

We must apply to the Bill the procedures of the House as they are now, and not as hon. Members might like them to be. I have said that I sympathise with those hon. Members and share their view, but the only fair basis on which the House can operate is to recognise that the procedures are included in our Standing Orders and that it is my responsibility to try to make them operate.

In accordance with the normal private Bill procedure, the promoters of the Bill have petitioned Parliament for powers not conferred by the general law. As we have been reminded, they secured substantial support for the Bill on Second Reading and they are entitled to expect that the Bill should be examined in detail in Committee, as long as they retain the support of the House. They are entitled, as are the petitioners against the Bill, to have their case heard by the Committee.

It would be infinitely preferable for that Committee to comprise members of more than one political party, as is usual. This motion will not prevent that, but I think we should not overlook the fact that when the Committee has completed its work the Bill will return to the Floor of the House for hon. Members again to consider it, exercise their judgment, express their opinions and reach their decisions in the remaining stages and procedures of the Bill. The House must defend its procedures to enable it to operate properly, and that is the basis of the motion. I hope that the House will carry it.

Sir Eldon Griffiths *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Campbell-Savours *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I say that this is a custom which many of us find most distasteful? We have been discussing other distasteful customs this evening. I was advised that this debate would continue until 10 o'clock, or could do so. In the light of that advice, would it not be possible to suspend the debate until 10 o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: The debate has been going on now for over two hours on a procedural motion. It is not out of order or even against precedent to accept a closure motion

[Mr. Speaker]

offer over two hours, and it is up to the House to decide, by the votes on the closure, whether it wishes the debate to continue.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the debate hon. Members were led to believe that it would continue until 10 o'clock, and the voluntary allocation of time between hon. Members has been on that basis. I put it to you that the House undermines the position of individual hon. Members in private negotiations, so that hon. Members are led to expect something that does not automatically follow.

Mr. Speaker: I know of no understanding between hon. Members. All I know is that a number of hon. Members have spoken at great length and that a number of other hon. Members wish to take part. There is no private arrangement that the debate should go on. It is not a matter for me, anyway.

The House having divided: Ayes 231, Noes 113.

Division No. 73] **[9.50 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Coleman, Donald
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Malone, Gerald
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meadowcroft, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Eldon Griffiths and
Mr. Robert Rhodes James.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Cleiland, David Gordon

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Craigen, J. M.
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gould, Bryan
Hancock, Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Weetch and
Mr. Willie W. Hamilton.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Question put accordingly:—
The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 108.

Division No. 74] **[10.05 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coleman, Donald
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
McWilliam, John
Malone, Gerald
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Penhaligon, David
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Eldon Griffiths and
Mr. Robert Rhodes James.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Dalyell, Tam
Deakins, Eric
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gould, Bryan
Hancock, Michael
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Heffer, Eric S.
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Torney, Tom
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Willie W. Hamilton and
Mr. Ken Weetch.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That leave be given to the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill to sit with two members to-morrow and thereafter.

PETERHEAD HARBOURS (SOUTH BAY DEVELOPMENT) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration read.

To be considered tomorrow.

Housing (Scotland)

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1986 which was laid before this House on 13 January 1985 be approved.

It may be for the convenience of the House if we discuss at the same time the motions on the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1986, and with the consent of the Opposition the Prayer on the Housing Revenue Account Rate Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order 1986.

Mr. Speaker: Very well, if the House so agrees.

Mr. Ancram: The full details of the housing support grant settlement are set out in the report which accompanies the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order. In the light of the time limits on this debate I will therefore not burden the House with excessive detail. I will, however, explain the thinking behind these proposals and also the limits which have been set out in the Housing Revenue Account Rate Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order.

We have reached agreement with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on the formula for the distribution of housing support grant this year. I should like to place on the record our thanks to the convention for its contributions to our discussion. In the housing support grant settlement for 1986-87, the Government have aimed again at concentrating resources on those authorities which, in our view, require them. We have estimated eligible expenditure at £308 million and relevant income at £257·3 million. Housing support grant will therefore total £50·7 million, which will be distributed among the 24 authorities which, we believe, will incur deficits on their housing revenue accounts in 1986-87.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): How can the Minister possibly justify the miserable Government of whom he is a member increasing council house rents by 168 per cent. since they came to power and now refusing to give one penny of housing support grant to the vast majority of housing authorities, including Falkirk district council, which is in my constituency, which has not received one penny from the Government for years? How can the Minister justify this savage attack on the living standards of council house tenants and on the council's ability to improve and expand its housing stock?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman will await the rest of my argument, he will get an answer. He is suggesting that councils that are in surplus on their housing revenue accounts should still be helped by state subsidies to all tenants, regardless of need. I find that an extremely strange argument.

We have left out of the reckoning the expenditure and income of authorities that we believe will generate a surplus. Had we not done so, housing support grant would have been wiped out completely and authorities which continue to need subsidy would have been substantially worse off.

Local authorities' expenditure on housing is, of course, very sensitive to changes in interest rates. By agreement with the convention, we are again applying an average rate of interest to authorities' individual volumes of debt—11 per cent. has been assumed in this settlement. If, however, in practice interest rates prove to be significantly different from our current assumptions, we will bring forward an appropriate variation order in due course. The 1985-86 variation order reflects a similar undertaking given at this time last year, and brings four authorities —Stewartry, East Lothian, Inverclyde and Monklands— back into grant.

The figures in the housing support grant orders reflect our continuing concern to balance the undoubted need for expenditure on housing against our responsibility to control public expenditure as a whole. This is particularly the case in the amounts we have allowed for management and maintenance expenditure. These allowances have been the focus of much discussion with the convention, and we have agreed that a review of how they are calculated should be carried out during this year. for 1986-87, however, we have uprated the management and maintenance provision in the 1985-86 settlement by 4 per cent. to hold it constant in real terms.

On the income side, we are assuming for the purposes of the settlement that rents will increase by £1·26 per week over 1985-86 order levels, bringing rents to £13·85 in order terms. Taking these housing support grant assumptions together with the Government's decisions on rate fund contribution limits, we estimate that average council house rents will rise by about £1·60 per house per week in 1986-87.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What advice has the Scottish Office had from the construction industry about the effect on employment of more generous maintenance grants?

Mr. Ancram: We have had discussions about the effects on employment of various forms of expenditure, including those which might be spent on maintenance. I shall say something about capital allocations later, but if the figures that were quoted by the chairman of the sub-committee of COSLA on housing are correct, many jobs will have been created by the additional allocations that I have made this year.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Would the Minister care to express the rent increase of £1·60 in percentage terms and relate it to the increase in the retail price index during the past year?

Mr. Ancram: I must ask the hon. Gentleman to allow me to develop my argument, as I want later, and in context, to say something about the level of rents that we are assuming and expect in the coming year.

It is right to consider the Housing Revenue Account Rate Fund Contribution Limits (Scotland) Order with the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order, because they are closely linked.

The Government have the responsibility to take difficult decisions about the total resources which the nation can afford to devote to housing against the background of restraint in public expenditure. In recent years local authorities' decisions to increase the proportion of expenditure paid by ratepayers have reduced the amount available for spending on necessary capital works. Their policies, of pre-empting a bigger share of the available resources so as to keep rents unnecessarily and artificially low, were not only bad for ratepayers, who had to foot the bill, but also reduced the amounts which could be spent

[Mr. Ancram]

on problems such as condensation and dampness. These short-sighted policies, which overall, over the past four years, forfeited £112 million in terms of housing expenditure limit penalties, exacerbated the housing problems that we face today. They were therefore bad for the long-term interests of the tenants themselves.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): The hon. Gentleman referred to the visit of the then Secretary of State for Scotland to Kilmarnock in 1982 when the right hon. Gentleman commended the Kilmarnock and Loudoun district council on its initiative and the spending on the Knockenlaw initiative. At that time, the council was in receipt of £4·7 million in housing support grant but since 1984 the council has had zero grant. How can the Under-Secretary of State match that with a description of an irresponsible council?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman has answered his own question. Obviously the council has conducted its housing affairs well enough and its level of housing support grant can now be reduced. Our expectation, on the assumptions that we make for the rent increase needed from Kilmarnock and Loudoun this year, is that it will be considerably lower than the average which I announced earlier.

Last year we took new powers and required authorities to budget for rate fund contributions of no more than £89·5 million in 1985-86. This enabled us, last March, to issue capital allocations on the housing revenue account totalling £276 million, which amounted to an increase of £49 million over those issued the previous March. Our decision this year to require authorities to limit their estimated rate fund contributions to a maximum of £69·76 million in 1986-87, as set out in the order before the House, has enabled us to issue provisional capital allocations totalling £322·5 million in Scotland for 1986-87. That figure is £46 million more than we issued last March for 1985-86. For the second year running, we are making a very real increase at a time of continuing restraint in public expenditure generally. This 42 per cent. increase in allocations of nearly £100 million over two years, reflects the high priority we are giving to ensuring that local authorities have the resources to meet essential needs. We have, for example, increased the special allocation for condensation and dampness from £16 million in 1985-86 to £20 million in 1986-87.

Moreover, although last year the accusation made by Opposition Members was that resources had simply been switched from one block, the non-HRA, to the other, the allocations for next year on both the HRA and non-HRA blocks have each been increased by more than double the rate of inflation, in all a £60 million increase over what was issued last March. Furthermore, the total resources available to authorities in 1986-87 will be further enhanced by the new arrangement which, for the first time this April, will allow authorities to carry forward automatically underspends of up to 3·5 per cent. of 1985-86 allocations.

In setting an aggregate limit to rate fund contributions of £69·76 million, we have consulted widely about the implications of the individual limits set. The distribution of this aggregate took account this year, both of the level of housing stock in each authority and of the limits set last year. As usual, we have heard exaggerated claims about the impact of rate fund contributions on council house rents, including some which I read in the press this morning.

Our view is that, making reasonable assumptions about loan charges and management and maintenance costs—we have, for example, for this purpose assumed that authorities will spend up to 6 per cent. more on management and maintenance than last year—average rent increases in Scotland next year will be about £1·60 per week. That figure was not seriously disputed by the convention when I met it on 9 December. Obviously the rent implications for individual authorities will vary, depending upon their own expenditure and income pattern.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): What does the Minister say about the Western Isles council, which already has the highest rents in Scotland — on the Department's figures — and which will have to raise rents by £1·90 per week? Is the idea that rents are already so high that another £2 a week does not make any difference?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for saying that the rents will have to go up by £1·90 a week. That is considerably lower than the projected figures put forward this morning by Shelter. The right hon. Gentleman knows, because my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State wrote to him on the matter after a recent visit, that part of the problem with the Western Isles is that for the current year and the next financial year, the council intends to increase management and maintenance by 25 per cent. That is considerably ahead of the rates that we had assumed, which were above the rate of inflation and which are built into the order. It is for the Western Isles to make a judgment on that matter, but it must take into account the fact that if it increases its maintenance and management expenditure to the extent that it has, that will have an effect on rents.

Many hon. Members may remember that at this time last year when I suggested that average rents would rise by just over £1 per week, we heard some wild claims about the effect of the rate fund contribution limits upon rent levels. It is worth considering what happened. Average local authority rent levels, as estimated in CIPFA's rating review, rose by £1·02 per week between 1984-85 and 1985-86. That is almost the figure that we had predicted, which was rubbished by Opposition Members during a similar debate. I do not think that our predicted average rent increases of about £1·60 this year is unreasonable in present circumstances.

During the current year the average Scottish rent is only £11.56. The rents of many individual authorities, especially in the west of Scotland, are lower still. In Glasgow the average is £10.64, in Aberdeen it is £11.21 and in Dundee it is £9.82. That compares with an average local authority rent in England and Wales of £15.64.

Mr. McKelvey: Irrelevant rubbish.

Mr. Ancram: From a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman says it is irrelevant rubbish. If he considers the comparative position of Scotland and England, he may not find it as irrelevant as he suggests.

In 1985, the average earnings of manual workers in Scotland were higher than those of their counterparts in England and Wales. With almost half of all households in Scotland in public sector rented housing it is difficult to

justify such low rents. If tenants have genuine difficulty in meeting their housing cost, relief is available to them through the housing benefit system.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister give the comparative costs of maintaining, repairing and managing houses in England, Wales and Scotland? He will find that the Scottish figures are lower, so the rents are lower.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) who shouted from a sedentary position—it is equally implicit in the suggestion that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) is making—suggested that that is somehow unfair to those who pay rents in Scotland. As a percentage of weekly income, rents in Scotland are about 7 per cent. as against 9·6 per cent. in England. It is time that hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies realised the damage that has been done in past years by artificially keeping down rents at the expense of the capital needed to spend on the real problems affecting Scottish housing.

In conclusion, let me emphasise that we are determined to continue to concentrate the resources available for housing on capital investment rather than on subsidies.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman said, "In conclusion". I was waiting for him to come to the point in his speech where he would deal with the effect of Scottish Office estimates of council house sales on the housing revenue account allocations. I understand the Government's determination to keep down housing expenditure, even if I do not agree with it. However, it is unforgiveable that in order to arrive at their figures they should produce completely notional figures of council house sales. In the case of Ettrick and Lauderdale district council, the estimate is 25 per cent. above the council's own estimate. How can he justify that?

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman may be ambivalent on the right to buy council houses, but the estimates have been made after close consultation with local authorities. There is no benefit and no advantage either to myself or to the Scottish Office in over-estimating the number of sales, because there would be problems about the block allocations at the end of the day. What I have said, and will repeat——

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: I am answering a question. I have answered quite a few questions already.

I repeat that if resources become available within the housing block grant I shall be prepared to consider supplementary allocations to authorities where there have been genuine reasons for a shortfall in housing sales. Obviously, that must depend on resources becoming available and I cannot give a categorical assurance about it.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose*——

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: This is a short debate and I have given way several times. I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Henderson: In the criteria which my hon. Friend has just mentioned, will he take specific account of the local authority which has already sold a substantial part of its property and has not been idle in regard to sales?

Mr. Ancram: That is one of the criteria which my officials and the officials of housing authorities will consider closely. It is not in the interests of either party to make over-estimates. Equally there are within Scotland examples where under-estimates have been made, particularly in Glasgow, which I understand expects to overshoot its estimate by £2 million. That council has not been known for its keenness to sell council houses. Obviously the under-estimate will be good for tenants in Glasgow because it will provide capital that can be spent on the housing problems.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: I will not give way again.

In conclusion, let me emphasise that we are determined to continue to concentrate the resources available for housing on capital investment rather than on subsidies. Subsidies do not encourage efficient management by authorities. Where they benefit the better-off tenant who does not need them, they are wasteful on any view of scarce resources. Our policy has already allowed us to make substantial increases in the level of capital investment in the housing stock.

Opposition Members often accuse us of making slashing reductions in capital expenditure on housing. It is part of their mythology of cuts. But if we examine the record of the Labour party when it was last in government, we see that gross capital expenditure, at constant prices, fell by 37 per cent. over the four years between 1974-75 and 1978-79. By comparison, on the same constant price basis, less than 5 per cent. has been lost below the 1978-79 level.

We have consulted widely and at length on the orders before the House. Above all, the orders allow us to maximise capital allocations to housing authorities to deal with the very real problems in Scotland's housing stock.

I commend the orders to the House.

10.39 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) on his promotion, and on his first night sitting in the Whip's place. If that is the quality of the speeches that the Minister is to give, the hon. Gentleman's progress will be swift. In the *Glasgow Herald* of last week, I read the headline:

"Rifkind in bid to revive Tories' flagging Fortunes."

The article underneath said:

"Scottish Office Ministers and Scottish Conservative MPs have been told to adopt a new, high profile presence."

If the Minister's speech is the high profile that the Secretary of State is expecting, he will have Rambo chasing after him very quickly, with his machine gun firing all the way round.

I notice that the Secretary of State seems to take great pleasure in the insult that the *Daily Record* paid him by calling him Rambo. After all, Rambo is a simplistic, violent moron, who has a total blind obedience to simplistic beliefs and is manipulated by people cleverer than he is. I would have considered that an insult, but on second thoughts, perhaps the *Daily Record* got it right.

The Minister's problem is that of all Conservative Ministers in Scotland. They are becoming increasingly schizophrenic. There is a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde feeling about them. The only thing is that it is Mr. Hyde who is trying to change into Dr. Jekyll rather than the other way round. The problem is that they see their standing in the

[Mr. John Maxton]

opinion polls slipping to 14 per cent.—a record except for one occasion when the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram) was chairman of the Scottish party. They like to give the impression that they are a caring Government and that are doing all that they can in difficult circumstances to look after the unemployed, the old, the young, the sick and the disabled. On the other hand, there is still "She who must be obeyed", demanding, in pursuit of her ideology, that public expenditure must be cut at all costs.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): Who wrote this, Helen Liddell?

Mr. Maxton: We have our bosses, but the Tory party is even harsher.

With these orders, the harsh Mr. Hyde is winning the battle. It is not the caring capitalism that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) would like to see from the Tory party. The Minister has suggested that the Government are being generous to housing but in housing, as in all other sectors, there is a rigid adherence to the ideology of monetarism over everything else.

The Minister made great play of the capital allocations, housing increases, and the rest. However, today the Government published a Green Paper entitled "Public Expenditure 1988-89: a Commentary on the Scotland Programme". This shows that in 1980-81, the total housing programme, which is what matters, cost £781 million. In 1986-87, it will cost £645 million, a cut of £136 million, or 17·4 per cent., and that is only in cash terms, not real terms. If one adds inflation to the figure from 1980-81, which makes the comparison less bad than if we use the 1979-80 figures, just to stay at that level, the Government would have had to spend £244 million extra on housing. In real terms, the cut in total housing expenditure since 1981 is close to 50 per cent. I do not know how the Minister can stand there and say anything else.

The Minister spoke about capital allocations, as if somehow or another, when he gives capital allocations, he is giving local authorities money to spend. He is giving them permission to borrow money. That borrowing has to be paid for. It has to be paid for by the rents and increasingly, as housing support grant is cut, it has to be paid for by the tenant. Sixty per cent. of housing expenditure is at present on loan charges. Is the Secretary of State implying that I pay that when I take out a mortgage? I hope that he is because I shall come to that shortly.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell the House what proportion of that 60 per cent. is paid for by the taxpayer through the other assistance that is given directly to individuals for the payment of their rent and rates?

Mr. Maxton: I do not think that the fact that people are unemployed or old or have inadequate pensions has to be taken into account. Ministers do not take that into account in other things they do. The capital allowances have to be paid for, in the main, by those tenants who pay the rent and interest on them. That is the answer to what the Government are doing.

The orders are of course about housing support grant. We shall come to capital allocations at a later date. In 1980-81 housing support grant was £228·2 million. In this order it will be £50·7 million next year. That is a reduction in cash terms of £162·7 million since 1980-81 and a reduction of £13·5 million over this year. The rate fund contribution is, equally, to be cut by £20 million between 1985 and 1986. We do not have to ask ourselves whether this affects the public purse or the Government, but what it does to tenants and local authorities in Scotland. The fact is that 32 district councils which received housing support grant in 1979 and in 1980-81 will get nothing at all next year. In some district councils the tenants will now have to bear the full burden of housing costs, which, as I said earlier, includes 60 per cent. on loan charges.

Mr. Ancram: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting. Is he suggesting that housing support grant, which I think was always regarded as a deficit grant, even when the Labour party were in office, should be paid at the same level regardless of whether housing authorities come into surplus.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): They are not genuine surpluses.

Mr. Maxton: As my hon. Friend has just said, they are not genuine surpluses. If they were the same levels of housing support grant local authorities would have been able to keep rents down nearer the level of inflation and would have had a lot more to spend on repairs and maintenance in their houses.

Mr. Ancram: It is a public subsidy.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister says it is a public subsidy. Let us have a look at the facts. In 1979-80 the housing support grant was £223·43 per dwelling. It will be £59 on average as a result of the order. That is a reduction of subsidy of £164. I admit that it is a subsidy. That fact alone has meant an increase of £3 per week in rent. At present the average mortgage interest relief in Scotland is £550 per year. That is nearly 10 times the subsidy paid to the council house tenant. That cannot be right. We are not suggesting that we should get rid of relief for the taxpayer but it must be an equal subsidy. Why should the poorer council house tenant get no subsidy whereas those who are better-off and buying their own houses do?

Council house rents have increased by an average of 168 per cent. — twice the rate of inflation. As local authorities have been faced with more and more cuts in housing support grant, so they have been forced to cut expenditure on maintenance and housing generally. At the same time, they have often had to raise rents. When there has been any attempt by local authorities not to do that, they have been forestalled by the Government.

That has meant that tenants have faced ever-increasing rents and poorer and poorer service. Let us take Glasgow as an example — an area that the Minister claims is generously treated. Rents have risen by 100 per cent.—which is not as high as the average—while expenditure on repairs and maintenance has risen by 0·5 per cent. in cash, not real, terms. Rents have risen by an average of £275 while expenditure per house has risen by 74p. The effects of that are extremely damaging for tenants.

Even if the Minister was not interested in the plight of tenants, even if he was not a thrifty Scottish capitalist—which other Conservatives are—he should be concerned about the state of property. Surely the Government do not want local authority stock declining and deteriorating. As

the level of housing support grant is reduced, so the stock deteriorates, because local authorities do not have money to spend.

Whatever the Minister might say about capital allocations, they are not keeping pace with the need for special housing, modernisation and repairs. COSLA, in its housing campaign document, stated that 332,000 houses in Scotland need modernising, 118,200 need rewiring, 314,000 suffer from dampness or condensation and 50,000 need major or structural repairs. COSLA estimates that that requires £700 million every year for the next 10 years —yet this year the Government are allowing authorities to spend only £280 million. COSLA states that that sum would not allow authorities even to keep their houses wind and watertight.

I know that the Minister disputes COSLA's figures.

Mr. Bill Walker: How much each year?

Mr. Maxton: As I said, £700 million each year over 10 years.

I accept that within the figure of 314,000 houses suffering from dampness, some could be modernised, but the cost of modernisation does not include remedies for dampness. Equally, dampness can be remedied without modernising the house.

If the Minister disputes the COSLA figures, why does he not meet its representatives and talk about it? He has flatly refused to do so. If he believes the figures to be wrong, why does he not establish a house condition survey such as there is for England and Wales? An ex-Minister, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher), is nodding.

Glasgow district council carried out a survey. It has instituted an inquiry headed by Sir Monty Finniston, hardly a wild figure of the Left. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has given evidence to the inquiry, but the Secretary of State has refused to do so. When the right hon. Gentleman wrote to Glasgow district council, he said:

"I note also that the intention is that the Inquiry will 'bring forward practical recommendations for action by Government, the District Council and other agencies'. Those concerned in the Inquiry should recognise the impracticality of proposing any course of action which would involve substantial increases in levels of public expenditure."

We know that in housing matters the Prime Minister's attack on public expenditure takes precedence and not the caring capitalism of the right hon. Member for Henley.

Housing conditions in Glasgow do not matter to the Secretary of State. It does not matter how many people are living in appalling damp conditions or what rent they pay. It does not matter to him what they are suffering in Glasgow.

Mr. Ancram: Rubbish.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister says "Rubbish", but Labour Members have constituents who live in appalling conditions in large housing schemes in Glasgow. The only thing that matters to the Minister and the Secretary of State is the need to cut public expenditure.

The Government have no support for their housing policy, or any other policy, in Scotland. The Government are on the way out. Many Conservative Members will be wiped out at the general election, and the sooner the better.

10.55 pm

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has accused my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland of being dogmatic, but it was the hon. Gentleman who exposed his belief that only the public sector was competent to manage housing matters. We have shown that we are pragmatic in all our legislation, ranging from the Tenants' Rights, Etc (Scotland) Act 1980, piloted through the House by the new Secretary of State, to the recent measures brought forward today.

A mixture of public sector and private sector participation is most likely to meet the housing needs of the Scottish people. The assumption of the hon. Member for Cathcart that the public sector will always be better is difficult to sustain in practice.

Mr. McKelvey: The hon. Gentleman may not be surprised to learn that he has a measure of support for what he says. Does he accept that the public and private sectors in Scotland should be examined? A house condition survey would show up some of the horrors of the private sector that exist in the public sector, because of lack of finance from the Government.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudon (Mr. McKelvey) served with me on the Select Committee when we considered the problems of dampness in housing. Undoubtedly, those problems exist in the private sector. It is interesting that more has been done in the private sector than in the public sector to respond to the problems. For too long, public sector housing managers pooh-poohed council tenants, especially in Glasgow, when they complained of dampness, which we now understand to be condensation. Their problems were pooh-poohed, but we know now that those were real problems, which should have been dealt with. In the private sector and a free market economy they would have been dealt with long since. The public sector's slowness to respond to tenants' problems has been a severe disadvantage.

The hon. Member for Cathcart quoted COSLA emphasising the need for more attention to be paid to condensation and other housing problems. Those problems exist, but when local authorities are given the choice of where to put their money, they do not adopt those priorities. When the hon. Gentleman's local authority had the choice, it preferred to subsidise rents rather than resolve housing problems.

Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary explain why we still need any rate fund contributions? The phasing out of rate fund contributions has been a sensible progression and I am surprised that the contribution is still so large.

Will my hon. Friend also give us a progress report on the sale of council houses? I am a little anxious lest the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which has much to commend it and is still before the House, may have caused a pause in sales because of the improved discounts that it will confer on tenants whose local authorities are not voluntarily providing those discounts. I should like an assurance that sales are proceeding satisfactorily.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) has left the Chamber, but he mentioned the fears expressed by councils who do not sell the amount of housing that the Scottish Office expects them to sell. I have heard about those fears. I do not know of any council that has faced that problem, but I am glad that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary assured the House that he would respond flexibly to local authorities that had difficulty in turning the assumptions into facts.

[Mr. Henderson]

The hon. Member for Cathcart made much play of the problems of interest repayments for housing authorities. I am sure that he will recognise the important contribution that the sale of council houses has made to reducing the debt burden of those authorities and, therefore, to reducing the interest that they have to pay.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gave me a sympathetic response when I raised with him previously councils' housing roles. They have other responsibilities, apart from managing estates, and I regret that much of the finance from the Scottish Office has been given on the assumption that that is the only responsibility of housing authorities.

There are remarkable differences in the apportionment of housing grants to various authorities. I cannot understand them. I understand that some authorities have been given no grants, because they have been left out of account under the Housing (Financial Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1978, but why does Roxburgh need £1 million of support while Ettrick and Lauderdale needs none? Why can Banff and Buchan get by on £800,000 when Gordon needs £2 million? Those are surprising differences and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary would explain why they still exist.

Can more be done to separate the management costs from the maintenance costs of local authorities? Much inefficiency is sheltering behind the conjunction of those costs into one figure. There has been a considerable mixture of allocations. The urban areas have had a particularly heavy allocation of support grant.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): There are more houses in urban areas.

Mr. Henderson: The urban areas have had a proportionately higher grant. Does the hon. Gentleman want details?

Mr. Foulkes: No, no.

Mr. Henderson: In the interests of brevity, I shall spare the hon. Gentleman the details.

Even in terms of population, a disproportionate amount of housing support grant seems to be going to the conurbations. I hope that, just because there are some loudmouths in those areas, that will not be the only consideration in determining grant.

Finally, I hope that the House will welcome the fact that the improved housing revenue account and non-HRA blocks are substantially improved on last year, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to deal with some of these points in his winding-up.

11.5 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The hon. Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Henderson) will forgive me if I do not follow the line of his argument. Can I make a brief and succinct intervention to this debate by raising with the Minister the question of capital consent generally?

It is my impression that housing authorities are now substantially tailoring their expectations in the capital consents that they are putting forward to the sort of reactions that they have been getting from central Government. The Government should take that seriously when they look at these figures in terms of just exactly how they are measuring up to the expressed need. The expressed need is now being screwed down in a substantial way by the local authorities themselves because they have had such short shrift in the past. The Government must not use that criterion as a measure of their so-called success in dealing with the capital allocation situation.

Secondly, the question of council sales is causing some difficulties. I wonder if the Government would look again at the problems that flow as a consequence of the Treasury rules on annuality. There is something like a 3·5 per cent. carry-over from one year to the next, which is unusual in as much as other accounts such as roads have bigger carry-overs—about 10 per cent. I think.

There is a point here because there are great difficulties when council house receipts are taken as part of the total figure available to councils. It is impossible for local authorities to have a clear and concise estimate of exactly what moneys are going to fall within one year, as opposed to the other. This means that they are left on certain occasions with either shortfalls or with excesses, which they then have to try and spend in short order. I think it is right to mention that that causes problems for local authorities.

The Government's overall policy is to reduce the rate fund contribution. They think that the way of dealing with the consequent higher rents is by putting people on housing benefit.

The Minister must not take his own Department and that policy in isolation from what is going on in other Government Departments. In the near future we are going to come up against some real changes in housing benefit regulations which will reduce the floor for tenants. I think that these changes taken together with the proposals for the new community charge, with a 20 per cent. rate contribution by people who would formerly have been eligible for housing benefit, is something which his Department must consider when looking at orders like this in future. I ask him to do that as a matter of urgency in the coming Orders this year and next year.

The initial reduction in the rate fund contribution was from £120 million to £90 million, and it was further reduced to £70 million. That reflects a swingeing timetable of cuts. The Government's policy is clear and we all expect such things to happen, but the Minister must consider the timetable carefully when making such cuts. Many people will suffer hardship as a result of the extent of the cuts and the way in which they are being implemented.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, comparisons with England are unrealistic. That can be said about the balance of the housing stock —the ratio of council-owned housing to owner-occupied housing — and proven maintenance costs. Given the maintenance costs that the authority in my constituency and in others have to meet, it is unrealistic to make comparisons with authorities south of the border. It is not comparing like with like.

There have been many fancy plans in the Scottish Office recently, including one to impose a tenants' self-maintenance scheme. What has happened to that scheme? I understand that it is going ahead but I have heard nothing about it. I do not support the scheme that was put on the stocks and made the subject of consultation in Scotland any more than the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill

(Mr. Craigen), for example, but I should like to know what has happened to it. We last heard of it about a year ago, when consultation was taking place.

Mr. James Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Gentleman may recall that when we debated the scheme in Committee on the Housing (Scotland) Bill, the Minister told me that it was a manifesto commitment. I told him that if he wanted to forget it, I would not remind him of it.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman has dealt with the scheme in his usual succinct fashion. The Minister will recall that I initiated an Adjournment debate on the housing condition survey last Session. I have not changed the opinions that I expressed on that occasion. The Government are relying on a system of local authority housing check lists. The local authority in my constituency is short of staff who can carry out checklist responsibilities properly. The survey is important and it might frighten us to learn what is happening on a properly assessed percentage basis. We must proceed sensibly to deal with the problem over the next five to 10 years.

I understand that consideration has been given to the possibility of introducing an equivalent to the client-group approach assessment for rate fund contributions in future. There are real possibilities in that direction. Local authorities in the Borders would be the subject of a much more accurate assessment of need. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) gave a good example that merits investigation.

I shall make two constituency points in conclusion. First, there are many houses in Berwickshire that are in need of repair and improvement, especially those in private ownership.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunningham, South): Landlords.

Mr. Kirkwood: Some landlords have great difficulty in maintaining their houses in areas such as Berwickshire. Councils such as Berwickshire are good at maintaining the public housing stock and they maintain it well, but they find that the private stock is in bad repair. Previously, the only way open to them of tackling the problem was through the old system of improvement grants, which was extremely successful. It may have been expensive but it was an excellent way of dealing with the problem. I hope that the Government will think again during the consultation and will allow an element of grant. I accept that an element of equity loan financing is appropriate in certain circumstances but I believe that the old form of home improvement grant was much preferable to the new proposed system.

The rate fund contributions and the housing support grant calculations leave Roxburghshire with a deemed housing support grant income per head of £565,000 and with an assessed rate fund contribution of £52,000. That leaves them with a terrible problem. The contributions are unfair. A reasonable rate fund contribution would be £200,000. That costs each tenant about £100 a year, which is a substantial amount of money.

There are problems over empty housing stock in towns such as Hawick, but the scheme that is designed to sort out the difference between the housing support grant and the rate fund contribution exacerbates the problems. The Under-Secretary of State's speech was optimistic, but many of his figures are spurious. The capital allocations have to be traded off against the changes that have been made to the housing support grant and the rate fund contributions. If they are added together, we are not left with the rosy picture that was painted by the Minister. For that reason, if for no other, I propose to advise my colleagues to vote against the orders.

11.15 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I agree with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) that if the Government are to examine the funds that are to be made available for housing, the amount of money that is allocated to housing improvement grants ought to be increased. They particularly help those who live in rural areas.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) huffed and puffed in his usual way and suggested that the amount required to carry out the necessary repairs to council house stock in Scotland amounts to £700 million every year for 10 years. It is interesting to note that Scotland would be asking for 10 per cent. of the public sector borrowing requirement to be spent in Scotland during the next 10 years. It is also interesting to note that it would amount each year to between £800 and £900 for each council house for a period of 10 years. A large amount of money will have to be spent on some houses, but no money will have to be spent on others. I find it difficult, therefore, to accept that figure.

What causes this huffing and puffing? For years the Labour party has bought votes by means of a cheap rents policy. That policy has been very successful. However, it has led to more and more houses in Scotland, particularly in the urban areas, falling into disrepair. It is inevitable that under the support system everybody enjoys a cheap rent, whether or not they can afford to pay a true rent for their property. People are not required to pay a true rent under this policy. But of course not; it is geared to catching votes. It has nothing to do with providing assistance to those in need.

Housing benefit goes to the individual. He qualifies for it according to his needs. If the local authority increases somebody's rent, it is paid by the taxpayer. He pays for the housing benefit. On the large housing estates in Scotland, it is not those who could not afford it who have been disadvantaged by the increase in rent, but those who could afford it. They do not like it because they voted Labour and thought that if they kept on voting Labour they would continue to enjoy the benefit of the taxpayer heavily subsidising their houses.

Anyone who examines the schedules will see that both Angus district council and Perth and Kinross district council receive a zero sum of housing support grant. Both councils ensured that their housing stock was well managed, but they are now disadvantaged because they must continue to support large housing estates which have fallen into disrepair. Sheer chaos has resulted from a policy which has been applied for three decades and which has been out of phase with housing support. The gearing and structure began to fall apart under the Labour Government simply because central Government could no longer afford to pay the vast sums necessary to local government so that it could continue the system which bought it votes. In future we want to see realistic council house rents being paid throughout Scotland, and support for those who genuinely need it.

Mr. Maxton: What is realistic?

Mr. Walker: A realistic rent is one which will pay to maintain the property in a viable condition during the life time of the tenants. That is the least that tenants can expect for what they pay.

Mr. Kirkwood: Can the hon. Gentleman hazard a guess at the figure necessary to achieve that? Does he accept that, when councils are selling the cream of the stock, the maintenance charges for the residue will inevitably increase?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman suggests that the cream of the stock will be sold and everyone will be disadvantaged, but that has not happened. Many houses have been sold. I can speak with authority only for my constituency, and I do not pretend to know what is going on in other constituencies. *[Laughter.]* Unlike the hon. Member for Cathcart——

Mr. McKelvey: On the matter of buying votes, the hon. Gentleman is well aware that I knew him in his boyhood when he lived on a council estate at a subsidised rent, which was less than six bob a week. Why did we fail to buy him? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Walker: Unfortunately, the mirth is misplaced. The system that operated in Dundee was run by a Liberal council. It was not Liberal in the sense that the members were elected as Liberals, but the majority of them were Liberals, and I give credit where it is due. It included Sir Garnet Wilson and others. The housing estate where I lived was and is called Linlathen, and families received housing benefit depending on their income. My father had eight children, so the house was heavily subsidised while we were at school. When we went to work an economic rent was paid. I should like to see that system brought back, because it is right. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is an accurate description of what took place in Linlathen. He may have lived on another council estate where the position was different.

I am not ashamed of the fact that I grew up on a council housing estate. Because we had an enlightened local authority which was not attempting to buy votes, we had a system which I advocate. This system means realistic rents for those who can afford to pay them. It means people can buy their houses. The individual should be subsidised, not the house. What matters is the individual, not the building.

Such a system would ensure that adequate funds were available for maintenance and repairs. In time, with an increase in grant, the majority of families could afford to undertake the work. They would, in turn, help to subsidise the scheme. It would be based not on the cost of the individual property but on the total cost. It would be self-financing and would pay for itself.

Mr. Donald Stewart: The hon. Gentleman makes a case for low rents being the cause of insufficient maintenance. How does he argue the case for my local authority where council house rents are the highest in Scotland and grants have been cut in half by the Government just to save money?

Mr. Walker: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs spent some time in his constituency studying all the factors. He is correct in a number of respects, but not in some fundamental and important ones. Each individual in the Western Isles is sustained by the public purse—either collectively or individually, depending on how it is measured—to a much greater extent than in any other part of the United Kingdom, except perhaps in Northern Ireland. The right hon. Gentleman's constituency already enjoys more than its fair share of public support. I do not disagree with that, because of the conditions in that area. One must, however, acknowledge what happens. The right hon. Gentleman is wrong.

If all councils were like Perth and Kinross district council and we had a sensible policy that did not have to cater for all the extravagant practices of the past, there would be much more money for housing repairs. Treatment of the problems of condensation, dampness, bad structure and design could be paid for out of existing funds.

11.27 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I could not understand why the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) was so enthusiastic about the Government's proposal. He was honest enough to say that he did not know what was happening elsewhere. That was self-evident. I am grateful for the fact that the hon. Gentleman said that.

I remind the House that the debate is about housing support grant. An answer given on 5 December 1985 in response to a question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) gives certain statistics. The hon. Member for Tayside, North appears to be rejoicing, because the £5,620,000 which his local authority received in 1979-80 under a Labour Government will be reduced to nil if the order is agreed. That might be acceptable to Conservative Members. It is not acceptable to me that my two local authorities—Monklands, which in 1979 received £7,383,000, and Strathkelvin, which enjoyed £3,139,000—will receive not a halfpenny. I do not know why we should rejoice at that. On the basis of those figures, the 168 per cent. increase in rent since 1979, the real terms reduction of capital expenditure for housing authorities and the fact that only 24 of the 56 housing authorities will receive housing support grant, it is clear that the Government are conducting a vendetta against council houses and council house tenants which most Scottish people find repugnant.

I fear that the Minister refused to give way because he understood——

Mr. Ancram: I did give way.

Mr. Clarke: Not to me. He knew that I would refer to COSLA's representations which, with the document "The Case for a Scottish Housing Condition Survey", utterly destroy the main thrust of the argument that he presented to the House today. He attempted to compare Scotland with England and Wales. On the basis of the facts, that is not possible. We are told that the Minister believes in a free market economy.

Who would assert that the housing circumstances in Scotland are comparable with those in England and Wales? The facts in those documents make it clear that they are not comparable. I challenge the Minister to alter his policy, especially when he pretends in public statements that he wants a good relationship with local government. I challenge him also to meet COSLA so that these facts can be discussed.

The Minister is not an expert on housing conditions in Scotland. Local authorities have to deal with these issues

day after day and face the problem of allocating houses when they know that the supply is insufficient to meet people's demands. They know about the problems of dampness and condensation. The Minister ought to know about them too, because we have a Select Committee which the Government have disgracefully and blatantly ignored. It identified the fact that it costs 20 per cent. more to heat a house in Glasgow than in Bristol. Perhaps the Minister will take such facts into account when he is selling Scotland short, as he did earlier.

The people of Scotland are dealing with a serious problem in regard to fuel poverty. The Government have so far ignored that, just as they ignored representations last year which have been repeated recently, about winter conditions. By their policies and this order, the Government have again divided society. Those divisions are unacceptable in the context of the Scottish cultural background.

Even before the order was presented, 64 per cent. of council tenants received not a halfpenny from the Government, in contrast to the generous treatment afforded to people paying mortgages, who have 10 per cent. more support from the Government than council house tenants. The Minister has treated COSLA disgracefully, although he referred to it several times. He might not be aware that it believes that implementation of the Government's policies for housing benefit puts on housing authorities a burden that they are not ready to accept, that they do not believe they should have been asked to accept and, perhaps most important, that are seen to be to the disadvantage of the recipient, who will be asked to pay 20 per cent. more this year than last.

Although the Minister dismissed the point, I must assert that this is an argument about resources and priorities. Age Concern was right to identify the need for sheltered housing and to remind us that we need an extra 28,500, simply to deal with existing demand. Local authorities are correct to set the problems of the disabled as an urgent need. I congratulate Edinburgh and Edinburgh district council on the priorities that they have set. I am delighted to know that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) opened such a project at the beginning of this week.

The Minister cannot pretend to local authorities, ratepayers or council tenants that the settlement is reasonable. It is not. It is a settlement which puts Scottish housing at a disadvantage. The sooner the Minister starts batting for Scotland the better. I say that without any great hope that he intends to do so.

11.35 pm

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): I have always spoken and voted against housing support grant and rate support grant orders since entering Parliament in 1970.

I cannot understand the arrogance of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), the former chairman of the Scottish parliamentary group, complaining that the Labour party was buying votes with a fair rent policy, when his Government have had a policy of owner-occupation and high relief on mortgage payments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said, every owner-occupier in Scotland who receives mortgage tax relief now gets more than £550 a year. The subsidy given to owner-occupiers in Scotland is 10 times that given to council tenants.

The order represents another attack by the Tory Government on the people of Scotland and the ratepayers. That is all right for hon. Members on both sides of the House who represent areas where there is a large proportion of owner-occupiers. I represent a constituency where the majority of the people live in public sector housing. Many of them live in houses owned by the urban development corporation and pay the highest rents in Scotland. The rest live in houses owned and controlled by the Scottish Special Housing Association. They pay the second highest rents in Scotland.

Cunninghame district council has been attacked seriously by the Government in the seven years during which it has controlled housing finance. Scotland has seen a big shift in housing finance from the public to the private sector. I hope that when the Labour party returns to power our Government will be as strong in supporting our voters as the Tory Government have been since 1979.

The Opposition are sometimes too soft to their political opponents. I hope that when we return to power we shall put the boot in and ensure that we play fair towards Labour voters in Scotland and those people who live in public sector houses.

In answer to a question from the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart), the Minister said that the rate fund contribution had been cut drastically for the people of the Western Isles because of high management and maintenance costs. The rate fund contribution to Cunninghame district council last year was £3 million in round figures. This year we have been told that it will be £2 million. That is a reduction of one third, and yet our maintenance and management costs are among the lowest in Scotland. The Government seem to pick a formula and apply it whether the rents are high or low. They apply the formula to hammer council tenants.

The Labour group is meeting in my area tomorrow evening to fix the rents and rates for the next financial year.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is there a Tory party there yet?

Mr. Lambie: No. We are looking for the Tories. Ministers have promised that they will ensure that there is a Tory candidate at the next election so that votes are not spread over the other candidates and do not interfere with my majority. I have been given that guarantee by Conservative right hon. and hon. Members. I hope they keep to it. If they cannot get a Tory candidate, I will find a good one for them, someone who supports me although he is prepared to stand for the Tory party to ensure that I get in again.

Last year Cunninghame district council fixed a fair rent and fair rates. We balanced the books, but at the end of the financial year we will have a deficit of £1·5 million. Why? It is not because of the council's income and expenditure policy but because the Prime Minister's economic policies are in a shambles. Interest rates are much higher than we expected. Because of high interest rates the council finds itself with a deficit of £1·5 million. Why should the ratepayers and tenants of Cunninghame district council have to find that £1·5 million because of the failure of the Government? The Government should give the money to the council.

In the debate on the rate support grant settlement I asked the Minister for an estimate of the rate of interest used in the rate support grant formula. Can he tell us now

[Mr. Lambie]

what rate of interest he wants local councils in Scotland to take as the basis for their rates in the next financial year? He used a rate of 11 per cent. in the rate support grant settlement. If tomorrow night the Labour group in Cunninghame district council decides that the rate of interest for next year should be estimated at 11 per cent., will that be acceptable to the Minister or will it be declared illegal? The Minister should answer that question tonight.

Mr. Ancram: In reply to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie), the assumption we have made on interest rates in the housing support grant figures is 11 per cent., as I have said already. If there is a difference during the next year a variation order similar to that before the House can be brought forward. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) knows, interest rates can vary.

This is the second debate in a row in which the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South has offered to become the Conservative candidate in Cunninghame, South. We will make the suggestion to the Conservative association there for its consideration.

I found the hon. Gentleman's remarks about rents fairly surprising. His authority has the lowest rents in Scotland. We calculate that this year an increase of only £1·70 is anticipated which would mean that the new rent would be £10·59, still the lowest in Scotland. The speeches of Opposition Members indicate that Labour party policy remains, as it always has been, to give the highest possible subsidy not just to council tenants who are in need—that would be too selective—but to those who do not require to be subsidised, in the knowledge that money used in that way will reduce the amount of capital that could be used to overcome problems such as dampness, condensation and the removal of asbestos.

Mr. Craigen: Does the Minister seriously think that, even at a discount, the Opposition Benches would be prepared to take the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is very unfair to my hon. Friend, who rightly pointed out that in all the calculations that Opposition Members make about rents and increases they fail to take account of the amounts of central taxation subsidy paid to them in housing benefit. I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point.

A number of suggestions were made about the effects of the orders on rents. It was interesting to see this morning in the newspapers a report of a letter sent by Shelter to hon. Members, which made certain projections about rent increases. In particular, it mentioned Badenoch and Strathspey, and suggested that, on the calculations and arguments such as those put forward by the hon. Member for Cathcart, the increase would be £2·68. It is perhaps unfortunate that Shelter did not check with the authority, because it set a rent increase of £1·64. That proves that the false assumptions that the Member for Cathcart was making lead to——

Mr. Maxton: Just to put the record straight, I point out that I never mentioned that local authority in my speech.

Mr. Ancram: The whole way through his speech, the hon. Member, as far as I can make out, was using the same basis for assumption as the Shelter report.

The hon. Member for Cathcart made much about the situation in Glasgow. It is interesting for hon. Members to know what that is. Glasgow has 14·7 per cent. of Scotland's housing. The city has been allocated 24·6 per cent. of Scotland's resources, and that is not exactly a city that is hard done by. In the last few years, to keep its rents artificially low, Glasgow was prepared to forfeit £33 million in housing expenditure limit penalties—money that could have been spent on modernisation, new build and all the problems that the hon. Gentleman said were in Glasgow.

I am sorry that I have not the time to deal with all the specific problems that hon. Members have raised, because of lack of time. The hon. Member made much of the £700 million figure put forward by COSLA. The individual authorities have identified what they wished to spend in 1986-87 and the money needed was £475 million. That shows the sort of double counting that has taken place previously in the figures put forward by COSLA, which makes such figures suspect. I have tried to get COSLA to give me the basis from which those figures come. If it gives me that basis——

It being one and half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 231, Noes 171.

Division No. 75] **[11.47 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Amess, David	Coombs, Simon
Ancram, Michael	Cope, John
Arnold, Tom	Corrie, John
Ashby, David	Cranborne, Viscount
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*	Crouch, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*	Currie, Mrs Edwina
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*	Dorrell, Stephen
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Baldry, Tony	Dover, Den
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*	du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Batiste, Spencer	Dunn, Robert
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony	Durant, Tony
Bellingham, Henry	Dykes, Hugh
Bendall, Vivian	Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John	Eggar, Tim
Blackburn, John	Evennett, David
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas	Eyre, Sir Reginald
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Fairbairn, Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter	Fallon, Michael
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Farr, Sir John
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*	Favell, Anthony
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Fletcher, Alexander
Bright, Graham	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Brinton, Tim	Forth, Eric
Brooke, Hon Peter	Franks, Cecil
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*	Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Bruinvels, Peter	Freeman, Roger
Bryan, Sir Paul	Fry, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony	Gale, Roger
Budgen, Nick	Galley, Roy
Burt, Alistair	Glyn, Dr Alan
Butcher, John	Goodhart, Sir Philip
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam	Gow, Ian
Butterfill, John	Grant, Sir Anthony
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*	Gregory, Conal
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*	Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Cash, William	Grist, Ian
Chapman, Sydney	Ground, Patrick
Chope, Christopher	Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Churchill, W. S.	Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*	Hampson, Dr Keith

Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
Maclean, David John
Madel, David
Mather, Carol
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Murphy, Christopher
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Pawsey, James
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Malone and
Mr. Francis Maude.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon

Winnick, David	Tellers for the Noes:
Woodall, Alec	Mr. Mark Fisher and
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*	Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

HOUSING (SCOTLAND)

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved. *—[Mr. Malone.]*

PETITION

Local Government Reform

11.58 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I wish to present a petition supported by 11,081 residents of Liverpool drawing attention to the plight of the Liverpool philharmonic orchestra, the Liverpool philharmonic hall and the Empire theatre, all of which are under threat of closure due to shortage of funds as a result of the abolition of the Merseyside county council.

The petitioners pray that

your honourable House press the Minister for the Arts and the Secretary of State for the Environment to visit these two establishments as a matter of urgency and provide adequate support for the arts on Merseyside following the abolition of the Merseyside county council.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

Oakthorpe (Underground Fire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.*—[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

11.59 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I thank the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), for his kindness in waiting up so late to respond to my Adjournment motion. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, for taking such an interest in the debate, which concerns an underground fire in a coal seam at Oakthorpe.

Who would have thought a few years ago that the village of Oakthorpe in the depths of Leicestershire would have achieved such fame and notoriety. We would rather not have that fame and notoriety. If we were not debating people's homes, investments and lives, the facts would be amusing. Few can have the doubtful pleasure of living above a smouldering coal seam with a temperature of 60 degrees celsius a few feet below the surface providing their own central heating. Even fewer can have gone to dig up potatoes in their back gardens to find them already baked, as Mr. Bates of School street did recently.

Oakthorpe is a most attractive mining village, close to the Derbyshire border of Leicestershire. Mining has been carried out in the area since the thirteenth century. Currently there are a number of active deep mines in the area.

As well as coal seams at a deep level, in the area of School street, there is a shallow seam of coal which outcrops just south of School street. It inclines away from School street at an angle of about 20 degrees in a northerly direction. This outcrop is composed of a sulphurous coal which is capable of, apparently, spontaneous combustion when exposed to sufficient air. It is that which is causing the problem.

I hasten to add that the outcrop is limited in its width to the east and west by major geological faults and that a large part of the village has nothing to fear. Furthermore, since the outcrop inclines so rapidly it reaches a substantial depth by the time it reaches an area called New street and beyond. I say this immediately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there is a fear, bordering on panic, among some villagers who would not be affected. There has also been a substantial loss of confidence in the property market for homes that would not be affected. I say to prospective purchasers and vendors: consult the divisional surveyor of the Leicestershire county council, who will be able to explain the outcropping and the geological faults and the facts about the property to be purchased or sold.

In September 1983, a property known as The Bungalow, in School street, suffered substantial damage. As is common in a mining area, the National Coal Board was notified and in September 1984 it sank boreholes. Those showed that the ambient temperatures were substantially raised. However, the board denied liability and did nothing to halt the fire, inform the county, the district or the parish councils, or adjacent property owners. It even did a smoke test which showed an influx of air —the very cause of combustion. As a result of that failure to notify anyone, the fire continued to smoulder unchecked.

On 4 April 1985, the county council noticed a deformation of the carriageway, and that the garden area of No. 59 had subsided. The NCB was contacted and denied and liability. By mid-July, Mr. Sparham at The Bungalow was forced to evacuate his house due to a structural change and at the end of July smoke issued from another depression in the garden of No. 59 which belonged to a Mrs. Kent.

Leicestershire county council moved into action and engaged consultants who commenced monitoring procedures for subsidence, temperatures and gaseous emissions. By mid-October the consultants had produced an interim report and the possible extent of the problem was becoming apparent. It was at that stage that I was told of the problem and became involved.

In early November the consultants' first report was received and it was agreed by the county council that a borehole investigation would have to be done to find out the extent of the fire. On 18 November I met the county council's environment committee, which is chaired by Mr. Eric Lodge. I praise Mr. Lodge for the decisive and caring way in which he has dealt with the problem. At that meeting reports were given which stressed the potential dangers and spread of the fire. The NCB had the expertise and detailed knowledge of the area, but was hardly involved, for fear that it might be considered that it was admitting liability.

After that meeting I sought an urgent meeting with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Energy. He immediately recognised the emergency and promised the involvement of the NCB. I am very grateful for the way in which my hon. Friend has dealt with the problem and for the help, assistance and guidance that he has given. I have been told that there are few meetings in his Department at which the problem of Oakthorpe does not arise at some stage.

In the meantime, two further disasters had overtaken the village. Mrs. Kent's house had become so unfit for habitation, due to subsidence caused by the fire, that it had to be demolished. Mrs. Kent was rehoused by the North-West Leicestershire district council.

By November, the media were getting interested in Oakthorpe and when Mr. Bates dug up his ready-baked potatoes the story reached the national headlines. It was the subject of chat shows and "Any Questions" on the BBC and was even featured on Chinese television. However, the story masked the anxieties that Mr. Bates and his aged mother were having about their home, which was literally falling to bits about them.

There are 100 properties in the area that could be affected by the fire and 30 of them have already been affected in one way or another. Since my request to the Under-Secretary, the Coal Board has been increasingly involved. It has done a thermal survey and has four rigs in the area, drilling and injecting grouting to fill the voids left by the burning seam. I am told that in April the NCB will be moving in four more rigs to under pin and protect the local school. The board is working on the protection of The Gate public house by trenching and boring.

The NCB has publicly committed itself to do all that is necessary. The residents of Oakthorpe and I are grateful for its response. However, the NCB is always careful in its statements. It is anxious not to admit liability for the damage. However, as the NCB owns the coal, as it did nothing to stop the fire after its borings in September 1984 and as it has been mining to within 250 m of School street, many of us say that the board has a liability under the Coal-Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957.

As we agreed in November, when I met the Minister, we are dealing with people's homes and not with piles of bricks. We are grateful that the NCB has been acting speedily to save those homes. Although the board has taken the initiative in carrying out remedial work, the extent of the proposed works is not clear.

We should like a statement from the Government or the NCB that they will deal comprehensively with the problem, whatever its extent. We should like to hear that the cost will be borne by the Government, or the NCB. We should like to hear that the NCB or the Government will meet the full cost of repairs to property and infrastructure caused by this underground heating and its associated subsidence, including all the necessary redecorating to property and reinstatement of gardens.

Not only have foul sewers been damaged, but grouting has filled such things as drainage outfalls, all of which will have to be relaid. The county council has incurred large costs in dealing with the crisis, and a unique disaster of this sort should not be a burden on the ratepayer.

I have seen a letter from the Minister of State, Department of the Environment to the chief executive of the county council, dated 5 February. This letter shows sympathy, but it is sympathy without commitment. I am asking for that commitment.

There are other areas where environmental crises have been due to former mining operations. I am told that in Barnsley and Strathkelvin district methane gas leaking from old workings had gone into the buildings above and been a problem.

In Blaenau Gwent, three houses over old workings collapsed. A mountainside was destabilised and it is sliding slowly into 170 houses. This was first noted in 1980. If action had been taken then, rather than in 1986, any action would have been far cheaper than it is now. It would have been better to act sooner rather than later.

Simply because this fire is slow burning, is it any less a disaster than if it were a sudden demolition of property? Is it any less a loss of property or hardship to those living in the area because there has fortunately been no loss of life or injury? This is a real and continuing emergency on a large scale, which demands Government action.

There are some possibilities and some solutions. Could the Department of the Environment and the Welsh and Scottish Offices perhaps consider an emergency fund as an insurance? If such a fund could finance immediate remedial work and reclaim costs from whoever was judged responsible for this cost later on, a great deal of good would be done. This would allow the immediate work to be done before the problems worsen, and it would not require anyone to prejudice their legal rights. While some might be insured, the insurance does not always cover all the problems, nor is everyone fully covered.

One very important aspect is that some people are quite unable to sell their properties. Mr. and Mrs. Bown, who have a property, at present unaffected, at 87 School street, in May 1985 purchased another property and put theirs on the market. Then the story of Oakthorpe broke, and although one or two people expressed an interest, they broke off negotiations for fear of the fire.

Can something not be done about this very real hardship? At the very least, either the owners should be compensated for the loss of market value caused by that

[Mr. David Ashby]

fire, or the Government or the NCB should purchase, at full market price, any property in the area affected by the heat, if the owner wishes to sell.

These disasters are not unknown in the mining villages. My hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who are both from coal mining areas, know these problems well. I am rather surprised that not one person is on the Labour or SDP Benches to discuss the suffering of a mining village. They care very little for these mining villages.

We should like a statement of NCB liability, but we realise the real difficulty in which the NCB may be placed by the 1957 Act. We cannot wait for the result of a court case to relieve the situation in Oakthorpe. Even if we had a court case and the NCB were found not to be liable, could the Government abandon the people of Oakthorpe?

In the spirit of our discussions throughout, I do not ask for a finding of legal liability. Instead, I ask for action. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to visit Oakthorpe to see the work that the NCB has been doing and to obtain the facts for himself. Above all, I ask him to meet those who are affected, the local councillor, Mr. Horace Sankey, to whom I must pay tribute for his dedicated assistance, and county council officials. I ask that my hon. Friend visits the area to show that the Government care and to lift the morale and confidence of the residents in the area.

12.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) on securing an important opportunity to draw attention to the difficulties faced by the people of Oakthorpe. My hon. Friend has acquired a well-deserved reputation as a diligent and effective constituency Member and on this topic he has argued tirelessly and strongly for a just and equitable solution to the problems that he has outlined. I welcome this opportunity to participate in the debate. I do so primarily as a member of the Government, but I am the Minister with special responsibility for the coal industry.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his eloquent account of the events at Oakthorpe and of the impact on the people there. I and many of my ministerial colleagues—I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, on the Government Front Bench—much appreciate the concern which must be felt by those living in and around the village and by the bodies concerned, the two local authorities — Leicestershire county council and the North-West Leicestershire district council—and the National Coal Board, irrespective of any issues of liability. I am pleased to see present tonight my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), both of whom have been strong supporters of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West in his determination to help those of his constituents who are facing serious difficulties.

One of the things which tends to characterise a community at a time of difficulty is the way in which all concerned pull together to deal with the problem in hand. I understand that all three of the parties I have mentioned are working closely together to do what is necessary to fight the fire and to deal with the consequences.

The Government have been following with close interest and concern events at Oakthorpe since the fire was first drawn to their attention last autumn. I have received letters from a number of people who live at Oakthorpe. They have been very moving letters. I am therefore pleased to be able to report to the House tonight that much positive progress has been made in helping them.

I have been regularly informed by the National Coal Board of the action which it has decided to take. I have been impressed by the depth of its concern. It has not waited for legal wrangles about liability — a matter which can be settled ultimately only by the courts — before taking action as a good neighbour at Oakthorpe. I understand that it has brought together its own mining expertise and that of contractors specially brought in to work there to consider how to fight the fire and how to deal with the effect of the damage by the underground heating on properties in the area. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West has paid tribute to that. The business of tracing the origins of the fire and then of dealing with it is, I am told, a specialised engineering feat.

Since the beginning of January a highly specialised firm of construction engineers under contract to the board has completed an initial drilling programme. The purpose of this was exploratory, to ascertain ground temperature and so plot the fire's course. Several drilling rigs made a total of 62 boreholes and the evidence from these has led the board to instruct the contractors to embark on an extensive exercise to limit and dowse the fire.

The current operation involves constructing a cement curtain around each individual property affected, with the object of shielding it from the effects of high temperatures. In addition, the introduction of cement into the surrounding coal seam acts to cut off the underground air flow and so contributes to extinguishing the fire. The cement is pumped into the seam by way of holes drilled around each property or by a surrounding trench. The process is called grouting.

The latest figures from the National Coal Board show that to date the contractor had drilled 182 boreholes and introduced over 88 tonnes of grouting material into the earth. The results of this operation have been encouraging. The grouting of one house is now complete and tests have been carried out. These show early indications that the process is beginning to bring the fire under control. The board has decided therefore to pursue the grouting operation on other properties in close consultation and with the consent of individual owners and tenants.

Furthermore, I have been assured that the health and welfare both of the inhabitants of Oakthorpe and the contractor's employees is a priority during this operation. Regular monitoring and testing of temperature and for the presence of carbon monoxide are being carried out, and remedial measures would be put into effect, if the levels were to rise. Emergency arrangements have been well planned. Some properties have, for example, been fitted with carbon monoxide alarms as a precautionary measure. I understand, having talked to senior officials earlier tonight, that so far there has fortunately been very little evidence of carbon monoxide. That is good news for all concerned.

The National Coal Board is also in regular contact with the Oakthorpe residents' action group, dealing with individual and general queries and the supply of regular information on work in progress. Day-to-day problems are dealt with on the spot by an NCB engineer who visits the

village daily. I understand that as part of the general information gathering and dissemination process a further public meeting is to take place.

Remedial work is of course at an early stage as this operation requires precision and expertise, but the National Coal Board has good reason to believe that the methods employed will be successful. Plans are already being formulated for renovation of the sites by landscape gardening. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West will have found this catalogue of National Coal Board action encouraging.

I think that the fire at Oakthorpe demonstrates very convincingly that the NCB is a concerned body which is anxious to do all that it can to relieve hardship to communities. In this case it is not even the board's actions which have caused the problem, nor does it necessarily have any responsibility in the matter. But because NCB staff are best placed technically to provide advice and practical assistance, they have stepped in and co-operated with the local authorities to solve the problem, as I have explained tonight. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestions that the board's actions are the result of my intervention; but I have to tell him that he exaggerates my influence. I am sure that the board acted out of generosity and public spirit.

Throughout the exercise at Oakthorpe, the National Coal Board has been working in close co-operation with the local authorities and their contractors. This is a fine example of community effort. In addition to helping on the technical side, I understand that the local authorities are also taking action to ensure that people in the village are being rehoused, if necessary. I am sure the House will agree that all those concerned have made and are continuing to make strenous efforts to deal swiftly and energetically with the immediate problem of dowsing the underground fire. I congratulate them on their skill, energy and enthusiasm. However, there is a distressing side to the story of which my hon. Friend reminded us tonight. He rightly pointed out that we are speaking of damage to people's homes and the resulting heartache and anxiety caused to a close-knit community. That is, indeed, a serious matter.

The local authorities have been energetic in seeking help to meet costs already incurred. My hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Local Government has been in touch with them recently to ascertain the position, and my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West referred to the letter of 5 February. I understand that the Department is now considering the position but is still awaiting from the local authorities my hon. Friend's request for further financial information. I hope that that can be provided as quickly as possible. I know from my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden that her Department will then consider urgently whether any financial assistance would be appropriate.

The question of liability is, however, a complex issue which cannot be addressed without careful consideration of the long-term consequences. Both the Government and the NCB must remember that they are dealing with public money. The immediate and overriding aim must be to dowse the fire. I hope that I have persuaded the House that the NCB and the other parties concerned are doing all that is humanly possible to do that.

I should like to end by assuring the House and, through my hon. Friend, the people of Oakthorpe that the Government are keeping closely in touch with the position there, and that I and my ministerial colleagues hope that progress will quickly be made to overcome their problems. My hon. Friend has rightly emphasised an invitation for me to visit Oakthorpe, and I thank him for it. I accept the invitation, obviously, without any commitment regarding eventual financial liabilities, but as an opportunity to see for myself the results of work already carried out, providing me with first-hand experience of the position which I can also pass to my hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment.

There will undoubtedly be difficult judgments to make in the future about where responsibilities for this fire lie. But we may congratulate all the parties concerned on being prepared to take action to solve the immediate problems at Oakthorpe on a without prejudice basis. I know that I can rely on my hon. Friend to keep me in touch with progress, and I hope that what I have said will have done much to reassure the people of Oakthorpe.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 February 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ABERYSTWYTH HARBOUR BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Tuesday 18 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL *(By Order)*

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 20 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Tuesday 18 February at Seven o'clock.

COUNTY OF SOUTH GLAMORGAN (TAFF CROSSING) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 20 February.

HARWICH PARKESTON QUAY BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Tuesday 18 February.

MILFORD HAVEN PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Tuesday 18 February at Seven o'clock.

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT BILL *(By Order)*

BEXLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

SHOREHAM PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (CITY EXTENSION) BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 20 February.

PETERHEAD HARBOURS (SOUTH BAY DEVELOPMENT) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration read.
To be considered upon Tuesday 18 February at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Friendly Societies

1. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received in pursuit of the restoration of the tax exempt limits for friendly societies.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): About 60 letters have been received, nearly all of which have come from one friendly society.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reduction two years ago in the tax exempt limits has had a most damaging effect upon the traditional social role of the friendly society movement, because the management costs of such modest family protection policies have made them very difficult to sell? Will he urge his right hon. Friend to use his forthcoming Budget to restore the tax exempt limit to the level at which he fixed it in 1980, namely, £2,000?

Mr. Stewart: I have no reason to think that the changes made in the Finance Act 1984 have had any such adverse consequences. However, during the passage of last year's Finance Bill I said that I should be very glad to meet the friendly societies liaison committee to discuss these matters. That statement was followed up by a letter to the committee in July 1985. Only this week have I received its response. It has accepted my invitation to discuss the future, including tax treatment. No doubt the committee will be putting points to me on that occasion.

Group of Five

3. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Ministers of the Group of Five are due to meet next.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): The Finance Ministers of the Group of Five nations meet from time to time.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer call for an urgent meeting of the Group of Five and urge that it should follow the lead given by France and Japan in reducing interest rates, which would give a boost to British industry? Will he also discuss with it international debt, which is having a disastrous effect upon the world economy, particularly upon the economies of the developing nations? It is absolutely urgent that such a meeting should be held.

Mr. Lawson: There was a meeting in London, under my chairmanship, only last month at which the likely trend in interest rates and international debt was discussed. There will be further discussions about international debt at the spring meeting in April of the interim committee of the International Monetary Fund. The general view is that as inflation comes down worldwide it will help to reduce interest rates.

Mr. Blair: Does the Chancellor agree that the important thing is not to discuss problems, but to try to solve them? Will he agree that the main priorities in international co-operation are lower interest rates, high

growth and a solution to the problems of international debt. Will he also firmly undertake now not to allow any domestic dogma to stand in the way of international progress?

Mr. Lawson: It is true that the difference between the two sides of the House is that the Opposition discuss problems, but we solve them.

Exchange Rate

4. **Mr. Adley** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors he estimates are currently most likely to determine the exchange rate; and if he will make a statement.

10. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from British industry as to the sterling exchange rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: In recent weeks the markets have been influenced by the substantial and rapid fall which has taken place in the price of oil.

Mr. Adley: Is it not interesting that those pundits who have said that we have an oil-based economy have been confounded, in that the fall in oil prices has not been followed by a rise in interest rates, panic on the exchanges or a rundown on reserves? Is that not a matter of congratulation for the Government? As the pundits are now suggesting that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is still considering reducing direct income tax, will he agree to confound them again by concentrating his mind entirely on raising thresholds instead?

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor listens carefully to all Budget representations which are made to him. I think it is indeed most welcome that there was much less disturbance recently in the markets than many had expected. That is a tribute to the strength of the economy and the sound financial policies of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Fatchett: Is not the reality somewhat different? Is not the fact that we have kept the exchange rate as it has been over the past few months simply a result of historically high levels of interest rates? Have not those interest rates damaged British industry, putting many firms out of business and losing many jobs? Is it not about time that the Government accepted that that is the reality of economic policy?

Mr. Stewart: The reality is that British industry has been doing very well. In fact, exports of manufacturing industry rose by over 8 per cent. last year.

Mr. Higgins: I join those congratulating the Chancellor on the subtle way in which he has sought to influence the complex relationship between oil prices, interest rates and the exchange rate, particularly since the beginning of the year, which would otherwise have been a difficult period. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the relationship between the dollar and sterling is not unsatisfactory, and that for exports the relationship in relation to the deutschmark is better that it was before?

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend's remarks about the handling of financial and monetary matters recently are indeed welcome. On the matter of the relative position of the exchange rate, I think that there were serious imbalances, which have, to a substantial extent, been improved. I particularly welcome the strengthening of the deutschmark and the yen since the Plaza agreement.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Minister told the House that manufacturing industry had not suffered by over-high exchange rates. Manufacturing industry, particularly in areas traditionally dependent on manufacturing, has suffered crippling effects because of an inability to export, which is shown up in a record manufacturing deficit on the balance of payments. Can he give a guarantee for the future that the pound will now reflect the needs of those parts of the country which depend on the export of manufactured goods?

Mr. Stewart: The current level of the exchange rate undoubtedly gives manufacturing industry important opportunities. I only hope that it will not dissipate those opportunities by failing to control its unit costs, in particular wage costs.

Mr. Roger King: Does my hon. Friend agree that if we were to take a great deal of notice of the Opposition's horrendous expenditure programme, as they foresee in terms of the Budget, that could have an effect on international confidence in our country?

Mr. Stewart: I am sure that international observers are confident that the British people would never be so foolish as to elect a Government with a spendthrift programme of the kind which would involve VAT of 41 per cent. and all the consequent implications for inflation.

Dr. McDonald: Do the Minister's remarks imply that the present relationship of the pound to the dollar and to the deutschmark constitute the Government's present exchange rate target?

Mr. Stewart: I have to remind the hon. Lady, as one frequently has to remind Labour Members, that the Government have no target for the exchange rate.

Oil Prices (Economic Effects)

5. **Mr. Beith** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the effect that falling oil prices have had on the British economy.

Mr. Lawson: The overall effects of falling oil prices on output and inflation are expected to be broadly neutral —if anything, slightly beneficial.

Mr. Beith: Has the Chancellor recovered sufficiently from the threat to his tax-cutting plans presented by the situation to recognise that it is an opportunity for British manufacturing industry to export, so long as it is not penalised by high interest rates?

Mr. Lawson: I have explained on a number of occasions that there are swings and roundabouts when the oil price falls. One of the things that suffers is the scope for reductions in taxation, and one of the beneficiaries, as the hon. Member has rightly pointed out, as I have done in the past, is industry, particularly manufacturing industry, whose fuel costs are diminished.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members are becoming increasingly impatient for large tax cuts, and that we hope that the fall in oil prices will not be used as an excuse for not considerably raising tax thresholds? Does he accept that

the only real way in which we shall be able to find the elbow room for substantial tax cuts is by reducing overmanning in the public sector, particularly in local government and the Health Service?

Mr. Lawson: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the consistent campaign that he has waged over the years for the reduction of overmanning and waste in the public sector. He is right to say that we must always be vigilant. We have achieved a great deal, but there is scope for achieving more, particularly in local government and the Health Service. As for the reduction in the tax burden, he and I are again at one in thinking that it would be highly desirable and beneficial for the British economy and for employment if we could reduce the burden of taxation generally and of income tax in particular. Substantial losses of North sea oil revenue as the result of a sharp fall in the oil price are not an excuse but a fact.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does not the fall in oil prices only confirm the point that the Labour party has been making over the past five years, that far too much reliance has been placed on the development of oil in the North sea and far too little reliance on the development of manufacturing industry within the United Kingdom? Why cannot the Chancellor learn that lesson, and even at this late stage begin to reinvest in British industry?

Mr. Lawson: The position is quite to the contrary. It is the hon. Gentleman's Front Bench that is in favour of joining forces with the OPEC cartel, so as to keep up the price of oil artificially, which would be contrary to the interests of manufacturing industry. That was clearly stated in a letter to me from the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald).

Mr. Ian Lloyd: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the Government's effective, well-judged and, above all, sustained attempt not to join OPEC in any sense. Does he agree that nothing does more damage to the capacity of the free market to adjust to changed conditions of supply and demand than an attempt to maintain either fixed supply levels or fixed price levels?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right, and in all fairness I have to add to my previous remarks that it is not merely the policy of the Labour Opposition that Britain should join forces with OPEC, but also the official policy of the SDP and, as far as I am aware, that of the Liberal party as well. The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has made this clear. We have no intention of joining OPEC.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer recall hearing the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) refer to sacking people in the National Health Service and local government? What is the economic sense in stopping the payment of wages to people working in the National Health Service and local government, who are paid for by the ratepayer and the taxpayer, only for them to go to the unemployment benefit office to receive money from the taxpayer in another form? It is costing £24 billion to finance——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about oil prices.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, it is. The hon. Member for Norfolk, North, raised this matter and he was not stopped, Mr. Speaker. The Government are paying £24 billion to finance that pile of human misery known as the dole queue. What is the sense in adding to it?

Mr. Lawson: I am not sure whether that question is in order, Mr. Speaker, but I shall be brief. Overmanning in many local authorities, especially Socialist local authorities, is a main cause of unnecessarily high rates, which are causing great damage to small businesses in those areas.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that it is irrelevant however many of our Opposition political parties decide to join OPEC, because the fundamental national qualification to join is that 80 per cent. of the gross national income should be from oil. We have not yet reached that point.

Mr. Lawson: Nor shall we. If my hon. Friend had been his normal attentive self, he would have heard that I talked about joining forces with OPEC. The Opposition wish to agree with OPEC in cutting our production, which is effectively joining the cartel, although, technically, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, we would not be eligible for membership.

Interest Rates

6. **Mr. Forman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates.

Mr. Lawson: Short-term interest rates are held at whatever level is necessary to maintain sound financial conditions, but no higher.

Mr. Forman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital to the future of the economy to achieve lower and more stable interest rates? Towards that objective, at a time when the oil crisis is considerably less and the pound is competitive with the deutschmark, would it not be helpful to consider urgently the possibility of joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system?

Mr. Lawson: That is a matter that we keep regularly under review. The factors to which my hon. Friend has referred obviously must be taken into account.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: If the Chancellor will not give an assurance on that, will he give an assurance that he will respond positively to the initiative taken by President Reagan in calling for internatinal monetary reform? Will he respond to the appeal for a conference? Will he co-operate with the American Administration in seeking to reduce interest rates to achieve more stable exchange rates?

Mr. Lawson: I noted the passage in President Reagan's "State of the Union" address in which he asked the American Treasury Secretary to examine whether it would be a good idea to hold an international monetary conference. I believe that there are great dangers in holding an international monetary conference when we do not know what proposals to put to the conference. However, if there is a way to build on the Plaza agreement and inject some stability into the foreign exchange market, I would welcome it.

Mr. Sackville: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the country's widespread desire for lower interest rates? Is he aware of the complete lack of public understanding about why interest rates must remain so high?

Mr. Lawson: Everyone would like lower interest rates, except perhaps those who are savers and depositors in

building societies and banks. No doubt they are content with their return. It is much better to get the return that those people receive today than to be cheated of their savings as they were under the Labour Government, when there was a negative real rate of return.

Mr. James Lamond: Are there any lines of communication between the ivory towers of the Treasury and the embattled Departments of Employment and of Trade and Industry, which are faced with increasing unemployment, including a large increase last month that especially affects the north-west, which is dependent on manufacturing industry? Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer realise that in the complacent world in which he lives, people are unemployed because of the Treasury's policies?

Mr. Lawson: To answer the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, the Government are one harmonious whole——

Mr. Canavan: They have fallen into a hole.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: Unemployment is a matter not for complacency but for concern, and that is why the Government have taken many measures to address the problem directly. The hon. Gentleman will recall that in my Budget last year I restructured national insurance contributions for employers and the lowest-paid employees, which came into force only four months ago. Therefore, we have not seen its full effect. I also announced the two-year youth training scheme, which will not come into force until April this year, but which I believe will have a beneficial impact.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that an absolute condition for lower interest rates is a low and sustained low rate of inflation, and that if inflation falls to 3 per cent. this year there will be a good prospect of reducing interest rates? Does that not contrast badly with the prospect if the policies espoused by the Labour party and the alliance were followed?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. The policies of the Opposition, who propose an extra £24 billion of public expenditure, would not merely cause a substantial increase in taxation and a VAT rate of 41 per cent., as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said yesterday, but would be highly inflationary, which would certainly mean higher interest rates.

There is another factor. The markets are worried that our unit labour costs are increasing faster than those of other countries and that, therefore, we may be becoming less competitive. That tends to put pressure on the pound from time to time and requires interest rates to be higher than they would otherwise be. Therefore, if wage increases were lower, there would be less pressure for interest rates to remain high.

Mr. Hattersley: Why are British interest rates so much higher than those of our OECD competitors?

Mr. Lawson: I gave the answer to that a moment ago.

Government Services (Tenders)

7. **Mr. Franks** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy regarding competitive tendering for Government services; and if he will make a statement.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John MacGregor): Our policy is to contract work out of the public service wherever this is commensurate with sound management and provides good value for money for the taxpayer. As the House knows, Government Departments are now required to test the market in specified areas.

Mr. Franks: Does the Minister accept that the scope for competitive tendering for Government services is almost infinite? Does he further accept that many Conservative Members are rather impatient with the progress being made?

Mr. MacGregor: In some key areas of central Government Departments the proportion is already high: in cleaning, it is 84 per cent.; in laundry, 73 per cent.; and in maintenance, 81 per cent. We are pursuing the policy, but I agree with my hon. Friend that there is considerable further scope. That is why I recently initiated a multi-departmental review to extend the application of competition and improve ways in which the policy is delivered.

Mr. Meadowcroft: What guarantee does the Minister require against bankruptcy in the tendering firms? Does he accept that if they go bankrupt it is almost impossible for the public sector to take back the services?

Mr. MacGregor: It is not impossible. I know of one case where a company was removed from its contract because of inefficient performance. The service specified in the contract and the company's performance are thoroughly monitored, and the contracts contain penalty or break clauses to cover the eventuality that performance does not match specification, or the sort of event to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Share Ownership

8. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proportion of the population in the United Kingdom who own shares; and how this compares with other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development nations.

Mr. Lawson: The number owning shares directly is at least 3 million, which is about 7 per cent. of the adult population, and recent market research suggests that the figure may be much higher. I regret that comparable figures are not available for most other OECD nations.

Mrs. Bottomley: While thanking my right hon. Friend for his reply, may I ask for confirmation that although individual share ownership may have more than doubled since 1979, there is still a long way to go in the pursuit of wider share ownership? Does he agree that many individuals, especially employees, who bought shares as a result of the Government's privatisation policies are in great danger from a Government formed by the Labour party, especially if its bite is anything like as bad as its bark?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is on to an important point, to which we need a clearer answer than the one we have received so far. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has said that if by any mischance the Labour party were to get into office and renationalise any companies, the shares would be bought out at the original selling price. That is

expropriating the money of millions upon millions of pensioners and holders of life assurance policies. Those pensioners have a right to know which companies the right hon. Gentleman wishes to renationalise and why he intends to rob them in that way.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Chancellor aware that the only reason why more people in Britain own shares is that he is selling national assets to pay tax bribes? All that waffle from him and the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) is false propaganda. The British people want more jobs, not wider share ownership.

Mr. Lawson: We should like to see more jobs, but that does not conflict with wider share ownership. They are in harmony, as those employees who are members of over 1,000 existing employee share schemes would fully bear out.

Training Expenditure (Tax Relief)

9. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to seek to provide tax relief on expenditure on training.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): Tax relief is already available for most expenditure on training.

Mr. Lawler: In acknowledging the need for a significant improvement in training for industry, may I ask my hon. Friend to consider extending tax relief for training and allowing all capital expenditure related to training as a relief against tax in the year of expenditure?

Mr. Brooke: I fear that I cannot give my hon. Friend any encouragement in that direction. The subject is essentially one for my right hon. Friend's Budget.

Budget Representations

11. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the fiscal measures to be proposed in his forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Brooke: A large number on a variety of subjects, though I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Mr. Canavan: Since coming to power the Government have seen fit to hand out over £20 billion in tax concessions to the richest 5 per cent. of the population. Is it not about time that taxation for those people was increased to bring about more public investment in real jobs for some of the record number of people who have been thrown out of work by the Government's economic policies?

Mr. Brooke: I am not going to get into an argument with the hon. Gentleman about the figures that he quotes, but I shall treat his representation as yet another that we have received.

Sir William Clark: Does my hon. Friend agree that if, in the next Budget, there is an increase in public expenditure of £24 billion which is not funded by a 41 per cent. VAT rate, the only other way that it can be funded is by a 20 per cent. increase in the standard rate of taxation? Does my hon. Friend agree that that would mean a married man earning over £66 per week would pay to the Exchequer 59p for every extra pound?

Mr. Brooke: That sounds about right.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Can the Minister estimate how much the Chancellor of the Exchequer ever listens to his Cabinet colleagues? When he comes to look at direct tax cuts, will he ensure that some of those Cabinet colleagues are listened to and that the money is spent on raising tax thresholds rather than on reducing the basic rate?

Mr. Brooke: I have known my right hon. Friend for a long time. I have always found him extremely attentive and sensitive to the points put to him.

Mr. Crouch: While my hon. Friend considers representations about changes in fiscal rates, will he not neglect the problems facing the National Health Service when he discusses matters with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Is my hon. Friend aware that, notwithstanding considerable increases in real resources to the National Health Service since 1979, we still cannot provide full, proper and good health care and the payment of increased wages and salaries in that important service? Will my hon. Friend remember, too, as he talks to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that any decline in the provision of resources to the NHS will mean inevitable decline?

Mr. Brooke: I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer heard every word that he uttered.

European Monetary System

12. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies his Department has done into the effects of joining the European monetary system.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Treasury submitted a memorandum to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service in June 1985.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Minister aware that this week the CBI has come out formally in favour of joining the EMS? The Government continue to say that they are in principle in favour of joining the system when the time is right. As the exchange rate has moved through almost every conceivable position on the scale during the past year, will the Minister set out the criteria that the Government use to judge when the time will be right?

Mr. Stewart: I am aware that Sir Terence Beckett said that he thought it would be a suitable time to join the EMS in relation to the current levels of the exchange rate. However, there are many other factors that have to be taken into account concerning the conduct of financial policy generally. We have always said that there are arguments both in favour and against joining the system and that we would not want to join unless we were convinced that the balance was clearly in favour of so doing.

Mr. Budgen: In view of the widespread and genuine misunderstanding about the Government's present monetary policy, will the Government give an undertaking that there will be a definitive statement on monetary policy in the Budget?

Mr. Stewart: I think that my hon. Friend will have to wait and see. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is sitting beside me, will no doubt have heard what he said.

Manufacturing Output

13. **Mr. Evans** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the growth of the economy as it relates to manufacturing output.

Mr. MacGregor: Manufacturing output has grown by 11 per cent. since June 1983. We are now experiencing the longest period of uninterrupted growth of manufacturing output since 1971.

Mr. Evans: The Chief Secretary has been highly selective in his choice of years. Will he say when he expects manufacturing output to reach the level that prevailed in May 1979?

Mr. MacGregor: The years were not at all selective. I thought it entirely reasonable to pick the figures since the last general election, when the country returned the Government to power. My choice of years shows the progress that we have made since then. As I said last night, there was obviously a major worldwide recession between 1979 and 1981. Since then we have been making good progress on manufacturing output.

Mr. Fletcher: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to improve and maintain manufacturing output and productivity is to minimise wage awards, and that the best thing that the Treasury might do towards that would be to raise tax thresholds as far as possible?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall not comment on any tax issue that my hon. Friend raises. There are two main conditions. The first condition is the maintenance of a low inflation policy, which enables our manufacturing sector to remain competitive. The second consideration, as my hon. Friend has rightly said, is to ensure that we keep unit labour costs in manufacturering as low as possible. It is worrying that at present they are higher than those of some of our competitors.

Mr. Lofthouse: Why has unemployment increased since last year's so-called Budget for jobs?

Mr. MacGregor: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made clear, the three major ingredients of last year's Budget have not had time to take effect—*[Interruption.]* There is nothing funny about that. The national insurance contributions changes of the 1985 Budget came through only four months ago. A second major ingredient, the two-year youth training scheme, comes into operation in April because it requires time to plan.

Mr. Dykes: With the manufacturing base in Germany being three times as large as that in Britain, will my right hon. Friend tell us what the interest rate to industrial and commercial borrowers in Germany now is and when we shall be able to reduce our rate to that level as a result of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's brilliantly adroit management of the economy?

Mr. MacGregor: Obviously there are many factors that operate on interest rates. One of the key ingredients is to maintain the pressure on inflation. To ensure the right monetary conditions, interest rates are as they are to keep the pressure on inflation.

Mr. Terry Davis: The Chief Secretary has told us when the measures in the last Budget will come into effect. Will he now tell us when we shall see the jobs?

Mr. MacGregor: We debated this last night. There are many factors causing the present levels of unemployment, including the demographic factors. We have made significant progress in the economy and there has been continuous economic growth in the last four years. Without that, we would be in a more serious situation. It is important that we maintain these policies.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Does the Chief Secretary agree that if the Chancellor of the Exchequer has available a fiscal adjustment of some £3·5 billion, as against the £1 billion forecast, he will be in a much more powerful position to help manufacturing industry? Will the Chief Secretary therefore tell us whether we should give any credence to the reports that a Secretary of State has calculated, on the basis of his Department's forecasts, that there will be a £3·5 billion fiscal adjustment?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will clearly have to await the Budget statement, which is not very far away. With regard to jobs, about which I was asked, I make the point that in the last 18 months more new jobs have been created in this country than in the whole of western Europe put together.

Inflation

14. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average monthly rate of inflation from June 1983 to date; and how it compares with that from May 1979 to June 1983 and October 1974 to May 1979, respectively.

Mr. Brooke: Between June 1983 and December 1985 the annualised increase in the retail prices index was 5·1 per cent. This compares with 11·3 per cent. between May 1979 and June 1983, and 15·1 per cent. between October 1974 and May 1979.

Mr. Jones: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the progress that he has just enunciated. Since the inflation rates in West Germany, the United States and Japan remain lower than ours, is it not the case that we need to keep up the pressure on bringing down inflation to be able to earn our jobs and our profits from trade abroad?

Mr. Brooke: I will pass on my hon. Friend's congratulations to my right hon. Friend. It is very much my right hon. Friend's policy that we should maintain continued downward pressure on inflation.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not a fact that the greater the number of people who are sacked the more inflation is held steady? The real barometer should be the number of people in the country who are unemployed. The number of people who are on YTS and similar schemes in order to keep young people off the unemployed list proves that there are at least 4 million people unemployed in the country. It does not give much comfort to those people to tell them that the inflation rate is being kept steady.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Member's economic theory is a little complex, but the Government share his concern to seek to bring down the level of unemployment.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the marked disparity in the inflation figures between the period of this Government and the period when the Opposition were last in power demonstrates conclusively that any return to the sort of policies advocated by the Opposition will almost certainly lead to a trebling of inflation rates?

Mr. Brooke: The lowest inflation rate achieved by the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 was above the highest rate since the last election. The Opposition pay lip-service to the idea of suppressing inflation, but the policies they espouse in opposition and the actions they take when they are periodically in government lead ineluctably to the debauching of the currency.

Mr. Penhaligon: Will the Minister name those of our major industrial competitors that currently have a higher level of inflation than us?

Mr. Brooke: I acknowledge that there are competitor countries that have a lower rate of inflation. That is why we are maintaining our pressure on inflation.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

17. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate for the public sector borrowing requirement for 1985-86.

Mr. Lawson: I shall be giving my latest estimate in my Budget statement.

Mr. Yeo: Bearing in mind that the PSBR may act as a constraint on the amount of any tax reliefs which my right hon. Friend is able to grant this year, will he assure the House that, if there are any reliefs, they will be concentrated in the form of higher tax thresholds and lower employee national insurance contributions, as these are by far the most effective way of stimulating employment?

Mr. Lawson: Cases can be made for many things. My hon. Friend will recall that in my Budget last year I did both of the things to which he referred—I increased tax thresholds and lowered employees' and employers' national insurance contributions for the low-paid. Looking forward to this year's Budget, it is quite clear that scope for manoeuvre has been affected by the sharp fall in our North sea oil revenue.

Mr. Pike: Bearing in mind what the Chancellor expects the public sector borrowing requirement to be, will the right hon. Gentleman allow councils to spend more of their receipts from the sale of assets to meet the problems that they face and to get people back to work?

Mr. Lawson: One thing is essential, and is clearly understood and agreed by all of the major industrial nations. There is a need to keep firm control of public expenditure. Within that control, we allow local authorities to spend their housing receipts, but over a period of time. Of course, if there were a Labour Government there would be no housing receipts because no council houses would ever be sold.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Bellingham: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to see today's reports, which say that the urban aid programme has been underspent by more than £100 million during the past three years? Is it any wonder that the prudent low-spending authorities feel aggrieved by the recent rate support grant settlement, which shifts money from them to the inner cities?

The Prime Minister: I have seen the report to which my hon. Friend refers. It is not true, because the Department of the Environment redirected the resources to other programmes, thus benefiting the inner cities. Some was directed to additional urban programme schemes, and some was directed to derelict land grant, which meant that most of the surplus was used up. However, I understand the feeling of the shire counties that they have to endure higher rates because money was deliberately shifted towards inner cities on the rate support grant.

Mr. Hattersley: What is the right hon Lady's explanation of the Gallup survey, which shows that only 6 per cent. of the population think of her as a caring Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that I do not look at opinion polls. I do not explain them either. The polls that I am interested in are those done on election day, and we have not done too badly at them.

Mr. Hattersley: As the right hon. Lady is too reticent to offer an explanation of her own, might I suggest that the reason why the country thinks she does not care—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] Will she consider the possibility of the country thinking that she does not care because she has presided over unemployment which has trebled, poverty which has doubled, increases in homelessness, cuts in overseas aid and £2·50 being stolen each week from the pensioner?

The Prime Minister: We have presided over a Health Service which is far better than anything that the right hon. Gentleman had, we have kept our pledges to pensioners, output is at an all-time record, our manufacturing industry is doing well and growth has been going on for six successive years. That is the outlook of a caring Government.

Mr. Hattersley: The Prime Minister heard five examples of her uncaring policies and uncaring style. Is she prepared to deny one of the facts that I offered her?

The Prime Minister: I will deal with the facts that the right hon. Gentleman offers, or at any rate with his interpretation of them. The right hon. Gentleman has absolutely no idea how to go about wealth creation or the creation of more jobs, whereas we have the highest and best record of job creation in the whole of Europe during the past two years.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: Bearing in mind the students' lobby of yesterday and the intense desire of institutes of higher education to expand and improve, will my right hon. Friend nevertheless remember that there are today 70,000 more students in higher education than there were in 1980—the highest number and the highest proportion of the relevant age group ever?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Students have the best deal through student grants and the opportunities available to them exceed those available previously, as the figures show.

Q2. **Mr. Gould** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gould: In the interesting speeches made by her colleagues and would-be successors at Blackpool last weekend, did the Prime Minister notice the passage in the speech of her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in which he asserted that unemployment can be brought down provided appropriate policies are pursued? Is there such an alternative after all, and why does the Prime Minister not take it?

The Prime Minister: Unemployment can be brought down by the creation of more jobs. In the last two years 700,000 more jobs have been created. That is the way to tackle the problem. It is being tackled. The proportion of the population of working age in work in this country greatly exceeds that in France, Germany, and Italy.

Mr. Stokes: Has my right hon. Friend had time to read today's excellent leader in *The Times* setting out her achievements and pointing out what still remains to be done under her leadership? Does it not show that, in spite of what other newspapers and political commentators have said during the past two weeks, *The Times* still has a fair sense of political priorities?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to confirm my hon. Friend's conclusion and I am grateful to *The Times* for an extremely sensible leader.

Mr. Steel: The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told the House yesterday that General Motors had not yet made formal proposals to purchase Leyland Trucks. In view of that, will the Prime Minister join me in recognising the tremendous and successful efforts made by the employees and the management to turn the Land Rover division into a profitable concern? Will she therefore send a message of support to the "Keep Land Rover British" campaign? Will she bat for Britain and back a profitable and successful British product?

The Prime Minister: Both the Government and the taxpayer have batted for the whole of British Leyland by putting in over £2 billion of taxpayers' money and on top of that guaranteeing the amount it takes out in loans under the Varley-Marshall assurances, which amount to some £1·6 billion. That is the faith that the British taxpayer has shown. We are anxious to have a prosperous car and truck industry and we shall take the steps that seem to us most appropriate to achieve it.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the recent fall in oil prices is an opportunity for this country, rather than a misfortune? Will it not lead to greater economic activity in growing markets? Is it not a challenge which our manufacturing industry welcomes?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is an opportunity. It has other adverse effects on this country which it does not have on our competitors such as the United States, Japan and Germany. They will gain more from a fall in oil prices than we will. Undoubtedly it will be helpful to our manufacturing industry and will reduce its costs. In addition, it will keep down unit labour costs, without which the Germans and the Japanese will get a bigger proportion of overseas trade.

Q3. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. McDonald: Does the Prime Minister agree with one of her many former Cabinet colleagues, the right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), that in terms of curing unemployment her policy has not worked?

The Prime Minister: Had policies been put forward from the Opposition, and had they been carried into effect, unemployment would be infinitely worse than it is and there would be precious little prospect for growth or increased prosperity in the future.

Q4. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Howarth: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing public anger and frustration at the escalation of violence and mindless crime? Is she further aware that at this time yesterday evening my home was attacked by three villians while my wife and young son were inside? Is it not time that we considered tougher measures to deal with the problem, and reintroduced the birch?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the House will wish to express great sympathy with my hon. Friend over the personal crime which his family suffered. He will be aware that the Home Secretary has just made an order available for the police, and that the Court of Appeal has made it clear that firm sentences should be imposed for crimes of violence. I do not believe that my hon. Friend's proposal would ever pass through the House.

Mr. Randall: Does the Prime Minister recall that I have written many letters to her about a constituent, Mr. Ian Lynch of Benedict road, Hull, who was one of the Army bandsmen severely injured in the Hyde park bombing incident? Is she aware that neither Mr. Lynch nor many of the other Army personnel have yet received full compensation for those terrible injuries received in 1982? Will she instigate an investigation by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to see whether those matters can be dealt with more expeditiously?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, we answered fully, and the doctors and authorities have looked carefully into that case. Unfortunately, they were not able to go further than they have already gone. We shall certainly look into speeding up matters.

Q5. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer has room for manoeuvre

in the Budget, it would be better for people on average earnings, especially the heads of households, to reduce the rates of tax rather than to increase tax thresholds?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that we would like to have the choice. My hon. Friend will be aware that in view of the falls in oil prices we must, above all, have a prudent, cautious Budget. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take into account the choice of my hon. Friend when he draws up his Budget.

Mr. Freud asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Freud: Will the Prime Minister, having taken such egregious pleasure in seeing off two Labour Administrations and three Labour leaders, now consider seeing off her 18th Cabinet member, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, and replacing him with someone to whom the teachers can talk, who understands the problems of the children, and who will consider them with faith and understanding?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has done more than any other previous Minister to raise the standards of education. I deeply resent the hon. Gentleman's implications made against him.

Mr. Nicholls: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to consider the Manpower Services Commission report yesterday, which shows that last year between 20,000 and 30,000 young people chose a place on the dole rather than a place on a youth training scheme? Does she agree that, while they are entitled to make that choice, they should not have been entitled to do so at the taxpayers' expense?

The Prime Minister: I can see my hon. Friend's point vividly. I hope that those young people will think again and accept a place on the YTS, especially since it has been extended to two years. It will give them a much better training than any that they would be likely to get in any other way, and a much better prospect of a job in future.

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Roberts: Has the Prime Minister had time to read the Valentine card which was delivered to 10 Downing street this morning by the nurses? *[Interruption.]* The hooligans on the Back Benches do not want to listen to what the nurses are saying about the Health Service. That Valentine card asks the Prime Minister to put some heart back into the Health Service, and accuses her of turning hospitals into supermarkets. As 93 per cent. of the population believe that the Prime Minister will listen to reason, may I ask her to listen to the reason of the nurses, who know better than anybody else that the Health Service is not safe in her hands?

The Prime Minister: I did not think that it was Valentine's day today, but I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that we have put a lot of resources into the Health Service—20 per cent. more in real terms than any other previous Government. This means more doctors, more nurses, more patients treated—in-patient and out-patient—and no previous Government can hold a candle to that record.

Q8. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. King: During her very busy day, will my right hon. Friend have time to relax, perhaps make a cup of tea, and reflect, with a degree of satisfaction, on the fact that the TUC has at long last conceded that the democratic right of union workers is to have a postal ballot, and that it has also decided to accept financial assistance towards that ballot?

The Prime Minister: That is very good news. It was our intention to give the ordinary members of the trade union much more control over their bosses. I am delighted that that has now been recognised.

Business of the House

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Timetable motion on the Gas Bill.

Second Reading of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 18 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Drug Trafficking Offences Bill.

Motion on the Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates Election Expenses) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY — Opposition Day (8th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Strategic Defence Initiative". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "The Treatment of Private Tenants". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Motion on the prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Continuance) Order 1986.

There will be a debate on a motion to take note of EC document No. 7163/85 relating to new Community energy objectives.

THURSDAY 20 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on a motion to take note of the Government's expenditure plans 1986-87 to 1988-89 (Cmnd. 9702).

FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on the Royal Air Force on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

[Debate on Wednesday 19 February
Relevant Document
7163/85 Community energy objectives

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 5-xxvii (1984-85) Paragraph 2.]

Mr. Hattersley: I have two questions. When is the House to have the opportunity to debate the report of the Select Committee on Employment on the long-term unemployed? Secondly will the right hon. Gentleman confirm absolutely that none of the proposals in the Home Secretary's consultative document on immigration procedures will be implemented until the subject has been debated in this House?

Will he understand now that there are many hon. Members on both sides of the House who are not prepared to sacrifice the long-established right to make representations on behalf of their constituents to the Minister himself, rather than be fobbed off on to his junior officials?

Mr. Biffen: On the second point that the right hon. Gentleman raises, I will refer the specific points to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern.

As to the first point regarding the request for a debate on the report of the Select Committee on Employment, I think that we should wait until the Government have made their observations, and thereafter we can consider the matter through the usual channels.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): When will we have a debate on the Select Committee system? When will we have the opportunity to consider the activities of some Select Committees, such as the Select Committee on Defence, which seems to be greatly exceeding the powers granted to it by a Standing Order of the House? Many other matters would warrant an early debate as well.

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in saying that the growing volume and quality of work of the departmental Select Committees are causing interest in the House. However, there is not that amplitude of Government time that would enable such a debate to take place. I have no doubt that this matter could well feature in a private Member's motion.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, now that the logjams of Crown immunity in hospitals have been broken by the Department of Health and Social Security, we need to end immunity in all Crown establishments such as prisons where it is right to imprison criminals but wrong to food-poison them? Will the right hon. Gentleman look at early-day motion 408?

[That this House welcomes Her Majesty's Government's decision to abolish Crown immunity from food hygiene legislation in hospital kitchens, following revelations of dirty and dangerous conditions; believes that hospital workers need the same protection as hospital patients; urges the Government to make health authorities subject to health and safety legislation; notes the standards of kitchen hygiene in other Crown establishments such as prisons are kept secret; and calls upon Ministers to make all establishments for which they are responsible, subject to both food hygiene and health and safety legislation.]

Will he arrange for a debate on this subject?

Mr. Biffen: Of course I shall look at the early-day motion, and I shall draw the attention of the relevant Minister to it. However, I cannot hold out the prospect of an early debate on this topic in Government time. I have no doubt that, when this subject is considered in respect of hospitals, the wider considerations will come under review also.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that a debate takes place as soon as possible on the recommendations of the second report of the Committee of Privileges? Will he at the same time ensure that the terms of his motion will be such as to allow the matters contained in the second special report of the Select Committee on the Environment to be dealt with under the new Standing Order proposed in paragraph 68 of the report of the Privileges Committee?

Mr. Biffen: I very much appreciate the difficulties that have arisen in respect of the Committee of which my hon. Friend is Chairman. I hope that we shall shortly have a chance to consider and confirm the recommendations of the Privileges Committee. I hope that, in so doing, we shall meet my hon. Friend's point in respect of his Committee.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Given the assurance that the Leader of the House gave last week that

he would speak to the Minister for the Arts about the funding of theatres and concert halls in the provinces, will he say what was the outcome of those discussions? Following the letter which the right hon. Gentleman sent last week to his constituency chairman, will he say whether he intends to make a habit of publishing letters between himself and his constituency chairman and whether he will make arrangements for hon. Members to see the letter that his constituency chairman sends to him?

Mr. Biffen: On the latter point, such a practice would be a breach of privilege as conceived by the North Shropshire Conservative Association. As to the former point, I regret to say that I am not yet able to take my reply further, but I shall look at the matter urgently.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the right hon. Gentleman find time next week for a debate on the implications of the legal actions ensuing as a result of the Wapping dispute? Will the Government make clear whether it was their intention under the Employment Act 1980 to have a situation where people on strike could be summarily dismissed with complete loss of the privileges that had previously been their right?

Mr. Biffen: I take note of that point, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will permit me to ascertain whether the matter is sub judice before making a more considered reply.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): Would it be worth spending any time next week trying to get it into the head of the deputy Leader of the Opposition that a confiscatory tax on more than £30,000 a year would yield not £3 billion, as he says, but half that sum, and that for only one year?

Mr. Biffen: I understand my hon. Friend's well-judged anxiety on this point, but I must observe that we are approaching that stage where the Budget and the Finance Bill offer almost unbelievably endless time to deal with these topics.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange in the near future for the House to have an opportunity—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Shall I stage a walk out?

Mr. Faulds: Belt up, you silly boy.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not referring to me, I hope.

Mr. Faulds: I would never refer to you in such terms, Mr. Speaker, but there are those round about. May we have an opportunity to debate the very important matter of the danger of the dispersal of university and church collections of art and other objects because the value of many of them is under the figure at which export restraints can be applied? This is a matter of great concern to the art world. When can we debate it?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman raises a very fair point. I am sorry that he had such trouble with the philistines round about him when he was speaking. I shall get in touch with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts concerning his point.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Further to the serious question of my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), even if we cannot have a debate on the Select Committee system, will my right hon. Friend have a word with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence and ask him whether a defence equipment appropriations sub-committee could be formed to provide a corpus of understanding and knowledge in this crucial area to examine such questions as Nimrod 3, helicopter procurement, and so on?

Mr. Biffen: I think that it is best for hon. Members individually to make representations to my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence. It would be a very unwise initiative if I were expected to have a formal relationship with him.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): When will the House have an opportunity to debate the provisions of the single European Act? Does the Leader of the House agree that its implications are considerable, in that it amends quite substantially the treaty of Rome? After it has been finalised, will there not be a White Paper and a debate on the White Paper before any legislation is brought before the House?

Mr. Biffen: I understand the seriousness of the hon. Gentleman's point. It is made with added authority, by virtue of the hon. Gentleman being the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee. I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to that point.

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the answer that he gave a fortnight ago to my serious proposal that from time to time the House should grant time to the Opposition parties as question time? He said that this would upset what he described as "the delicate balance" of horse trading. I submit to my right hon. Friend that it could not do so, since no Opposition Member could admit that their policies would not withstand scrutiny, whereas every Conservative Member is aware that they are in need of scrutiny. The matter has become all the more urgent in view of the statement that their policies would cost this country £24 billion a year, and the alliance parties have not revealed what their policies are.

Mr. Biffen: I do not believe that my hon. Friend should be quite so pessimistic. The present structure of parliamentary debate does us rather well, and I should like to keep it that way.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Has the Leader of the House noticed that when the House is busy there is a growing and rather embarrassing crush of ex-Cabinet Ministers trying to get seats on the Bench below the Gangway? If we are to have an important debate next week, can he arrange for a few chairs to be brought into the Chamber so that they can be accommodated until the electorate are given a chance to remove them permanently from their seats?

Mr. Biffen: I think that it is bath chairs that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is my right hon. Friend aware of early-day motion 280?

[That this House notes the widespread concern felt in Parliament by eminent scientists, by other responsible observers and by members of the public who have viewed programmes on the matter screened by Channel 4, that Anne Maguire, Patrick Maguire (senior), Vincent

[Sir John Biggs-Davison]

Maguire (then aged 17), Patrick Maguire (then aged 14), Sean Smyth, Patrick O'Neill and the late Guiseppe Conlon, sentenced in 1976 to long terms of imprisonment since served, now appear, despite confirmation of their convictions at the time by the Court of Appeal, to have been entirely innocent of the crime with which they were charged; further notes at the conclusion of a debate in the other place on 17th May 1975, the recognition by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office of the strength of feeling on this matter in that House and his pledge to draw the attention of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what had been said; and therefore earnestly urges the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the interests of the highest standards of British justice of which this country needs to feel rightly proud, to move without delay for a review of these convictions, either under the provisions of section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, or by such other public process of review as he may deem appropriate to this disturbing case.]

The motion, on the miscarriage of justice in the Maguire case, has attracted nearly 180 signatures and is supported by a number of hon. Members who are precluded from signing early-day motions. Does my right hon. Friend think that the time is approaching for this subject to be debated, or at least for a statement to be made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary?

Mr. Biffen: I cannot helpfully go beyond what I said last week in response to a similar question, but I shall certainly look at it again.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is the House to have an opportunity to express its universal delight at the release of Anatoly Shcharansky, especially for those hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been campaigning for 10 years for his release? Will the right hon. Gentleman say how welcome Mr. Shcharansky will be in this country and in the House to receive a bible signed by 500 hon. Members, including you, Mr. Speaker, and that meanwhile we shall continue to campaign for the release of his family, Sakharov, Lerner and all the others who are held in that country and are entitled to the same freedom as Shcharansky is now receiving?

Mr. Biffen: I think that the procedures which are available to hon. Members for such demonstrations of affection and concern are available in this instance. If the hon. and learned Gentleman would like to make other representations suggesting a more formal expression of reaction on the part of the House, those matters will be considered. I suggest that the early-day motion performs a real and valid function on such matters.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Has my right hon. Friend seen early-day motion 397, signed by 107 of my right hon. and hon. Friends, which pays warm tribute to the bands of the Army, the Royal Marines and the Royal Air Force whose high standards of excellence lift the spirit of the nation?

[That this House pays tribute to the high standards of excellence of the bands of the Army trained at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, the Royal Marines trained at Deal, and the Royal Air Force trained at Uxbridge, all of which add splendour to Royal and state occasions, promote recruiting and morale, lift the spirits of the nation, and as part of the traditional British scene help to attract to British shores visitors whose spending generates income, employment and a tax yield to Her Majesty's Government; takes note of the Eleventh Report of the Public Accounts Committee which expresses grave disquiet that the Ministry of Defence should have decided on a joint Defence School of Music which would disrupt the training of service musicians and entail expenditure of £10 million before carrying out a full investment appraisal, and recommends that the Ministry of Defence should review the need for a Defence School of Music, as well as its possible location; thanks the Right honourable Lady the Prime Minister for Her reply on 6th February to the honourable Member for Twickenham that the new Secretary of State will look at the matter afresh in the light of the latest facts; and hopes that band training will long continue to flourish at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, at Deal and at Uxbridge, respectively.]

As the reprieve of Kneller hall is not, so far, permanent, can my right hon. Friend find time for us to debate the astonishing decision of my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to uproot the Royal Military School of Music from Twickenham which has been its home for 128 years?

Mr. Biffen: I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend on the tremendous part he has played in this development. It reminds us all that there is more elevation to constituency campaigning than mere paving stones. On the request of my hon. Friend, I think that we should wait until the Government have been able to reflect on the findings of the Public Accounts Committee. That will be an appropriate time for a further debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that the statement made by the Home Secretary three days ago concerning the rights of Members of Parliament to take up immigration cases has caused enormous disquiet throughout the immigrant community and is a fundamental attack on their rights to be represented and on the rights of Members of Parliament to deal with Government Departments? Can he assure us that there will be a full debate on that in the near future? Will he also convey to the Home Secretary that the view of many hon. Members is that the Government's whole policy on immigration in the past year has been one of deception, subterfuge and misleading of the House and the country about their real intention with regard to immigration law?

Mr. Biffen: I do not believe that the proposals of my right hon. Friend have had the impact upon the immigrant community described by the hon. Gentleman. However, I can assure him that there will be a debate on the guidelines before they become effective. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Has my right hon. Friend seen the important report in *The Times* today which draws attention to the appalling behaviour of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) in his criticism of the Chairman and procedures of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, which he scarcely ever attends? May we have an early debate on that contemptuous and contemptible behaviour?

Mr. Biffen: I have not seen the newspaper report. I am sorry that charity is not running in all quarters of the House. I take note of what my hon. Friend has said, but I am not certain what I can do about it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): In view of the debate next week on public expenditure, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement? Scottish Members will find it difficult to digest the Government's intentions on public expenditure with regard to the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Scottish Development Agency because of what the Scottish Office has confirmed to me in written answers on the continuing uncertainty over the treatment of profits accruing to those organisations from the sale of shares? In view of that, may we have an early statement, particularly given yesterday's announcement by the Scottish Office of an outrageous and totally unacceptable £1·5 million cut in the Highlands and Islands Development Board budget for next year?

Mr. Biffen: I am certain that the normal convention will be followed in the structure of the debate on Thursday concerning public expenditure. It is a great British occasion uniting us all. I shall refer the specific Scottish matters to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): In view of the serious decline in the size of our merchant fleet, particularly those ships sailing under Britsh flags, will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on the subject?

Mr. Biffen: I wish that such a debate might cure the problem, but it derives from many factors. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Leader of the House consider initiating a debate to discuss the situation developing in the National Health Service hospitals? The structures of staffing are such that nurses are concerned that they will be responsible professionally and for management to people who have no experience in nursing. There are fears that economies in the running of hospitals could be argued over a bed in which patients need treatment. Is there not a need for a debate to ensure that patients come first?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is correct in saying that there are a number of fears on this topic. I think that they are ill founded and can often give rise to unintended mischief. However, I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in a number of different parts of the country there has, for a number of weeks, been anxiety as to the possible sites that the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive might nominate for the dumping of nuclear waste? Can he prevail on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Industry to make an early statement so that minds may be put at rest?

Mr. Biffen: I realise that there is considerable interest in this subject, and I shall be in touch with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to inquire when a statement may be made.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it possible to arrange for the Secretary of State for Social Services to come to the House on Monday and tell us if, in view of the cold spell, additional payments for those on supplementary benefit could be made? Is it not a scandal that no statement has been made by the Secretary of State and that literally hundreds of thousands of the poorest people, certainly the elderly, are suffering intense misery because they do not have the means to keep their homes adequately heated?

Mr. Biffen: I note the language used by the hon. Member to present his anxiety, and perhaps he will allow me to leave it at that. I shall contact my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to see whether it is appropriate to make a statement.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Has my right hon. Friend had a message to the effect that in the other place an amendment to the Shops Bill was passed, supported by some good Conservatives and by an excellent and venerable ex-Prime Minister? Is he aware that the passing of the amendment will assist in making the Bill more acceptable, if my right hon. Friend can persuade his colleagues to accept the amendment, or at least give it a free ride, or a free vote?

Mr. Biffen: We are a little away from considering Lords amendments to that legislation, but I note what my hon. Friend says, which I know is intended to help the Treasury Bench as it slides along. Even better, I am aided by the presence of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary, which makes it quite unnecessary for me to comment further.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The Leader of the House will recall without difficulty the recent incident at Sellafield and he will also be aware of the expressions of unease and the speculation, some of which was warranted and some not, in the press since then. Is he aware that since the incident, as recently as in the past 24 hours, an employee of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., representing the company at an open debate at Durham university last night, revealed, wittingly or otherwise, that files are kept not only on those individuals who actively campaign in opposition to matters nuclear but on members of their families? In view of this, will the Leader of the House —I am sure that he will find it difficult to provide Government time—ensure that next week we have a ministerial statement so that hon. Members may question the responsible Minister on this matter?

Mr. Biffen: I note the hon. Gentleman's point. I shall refer what he has said to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, who, in any case, will be answering questions on those matters.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Has my right hon. Friend heard that, when a constituent of mine travelled by train from Kings Lynn to London last week, the train broke down eight times and arrived almost an hour late? Furthermore, her breakfast was on the wrong side of a locked door and the toilets in the carriage were filthy. In the light of that disgraceful incident, can my right hon. Friend hold out any prospect of an early debate on British Rail?

Mr. Biffen: That experience, although highly regrettable, is not necessarily unique. I will draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to the anxiety that my hon. Friend expresses.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill)? Is it fair to say that the reply of the Leader of the House suggested that we could not have a debate or a statement on Murdoch's sacking of 5,000 print workers, because of the sub judice rule? It seems strange that Ministers, such as the Paymaster General, can appear regularly on television and on radio to talk about Murdoch's sacking and fortress Wapping, but the British Parliament cannot have a debate on the affair. It is high time that that vindictive act of an American citizen, who would not get away with it if he were in America, should be debated to thrash out the matter of vindictive acts waged by employers just because workers are standing together and taking collective action. Under this Government collective action is OK for the bosses, but not for the workers.

Mr. Biffen: I answered the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) in the way that I did because I believe that his question invited an answer that could infringe the sub judice rule. That is why I said that I wished to take advice on the matter. As to the request for a wider debate on the dispute involving the titles of Mr. Murdoch, I shall refer it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the unacceptable practice of some local authorities, including Leicester city council, of including political terms in tendering documents designed to exclude firms that have worked on nuclear installations and for other political reasons? Wnen can we expect legislation to outlaw that unacceptable abuse of power?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. and learned Friend makes a firm point about a practice that is causing considerable disquiet. The preparation of legislation would be a demanding task and it is unlikely that it would happen in the current Session, but I shall pass on his remarks.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is there any prospect of a debate on law and order? If so, will the Leader of the House ensure the presence and participation of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), who replied to the debate on the Wages Bill on Tuesday evening? Several hon. Members and I said to him that 9,000 employers broke the law last year by illegally underpaying young and women workers in the wages councils sector. Only two were prosecuted and they were fined £700. The Minister said that that was all right because only 8 per cent. of employers were crooks.

Mr. Biffen: Negligently, I was not in my place to hear the debate, so I am embarrassed to accept the hon. Gentleman's fair description of it. I note his concern that we should have an early debate on law and order. I shall contact the Home Office to see whether that is possible.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a debate on the future of the British bus industry? Has the Leader of the House noticed that, despite statements and questions on the Floor of the House, it has not been possible to discuss the affair of Leyland Bus in detail? It is in the Leyland Bus division of British Leyland that major redundancies are likely to take place. Can he take some action? Is he aware that I arranged a meeting with the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport to take place next Wednesday with two senior managers of Leyland Bus and that the BL board intervened to prevent that meeting from taking place? That act was sanctioned by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that that is a direct interference with my rights as a Member of the House? I am defending the jobs of my constituents, yet until now Parliament has failed to provide us with the time to debate the future of Leyland Bus. We must have time, and I appeal to the Leader of the House to provide it for us at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Biffen: If the hon. Gentleman really believes that the action of the management of British Leyland was a breach of privilege in that it impinged upon his work as a Member of Parliament, he knows the remedy open to him, especially after his experience with the chairman of the British Steel Corporation. I shall refer his request for a debate, to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Trade and Industry. I realise that the matter causes great concern in many quarters.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Minister to speak in this important debate, I remind the House that many hon. Members have a direct constituency interest in the subject. No fewer than 12 of them have already notified their intention to speak, and others may wish to do so. Therefore, I appeal for brief contributions.

4.1 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): The debate, which is in response to requests from hon. Members on both sides of the House, is about the extension of the multi-fibre arrangement to allow imports of textiles and clothing to be controlled for a further period after 31 December. The arrangement and the complexities embraced therein exemplify the problems of reconciliation that are inherent in Britain's trading policy.

Our policy must be considered from three principal aspects. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have their views on this, and will voice their arguments in the interests of their constituents, as they see them. It is the place of the Government to reconcile those and to offer the best solution in the light of a careful consideration of all the arguments. I certainly do not see the divisions along party lines. There are inconsistencies in the arguments of some of my hon. Friends, just as there are contradictions and anomalies in the attitude of the Opposition. Indeed, differing voices can be heard in industry and in many trade unions.

I suggest that the House approaches the matter from this angle: first—I mention it first and rate it first—are the interests of the people of the United Kingdom, although even here there are problems of reconciliation because the people of the United Kingdom are producers and consumers; secondly, the complexities inherent in our position of negotiating jointly with our partners in the EC; and, thirdly, the position of the MFA in relation to our world trading policy, the GATT and the overall objective of the reduction of trade barriers to our goods and services worldwide.

When the MFA was set up in 1974, the text of the arrangement stated that it was intended to be a temporary instrument. That intention remains, but I must tell the House that I have no intention of getting rid of it until I am satisfied that the need for the safeguard that it provides has ceased to exist.

I invite the House, initially, to consider the position of the industry. It is a great industry employing nearly 500,000 people—about 2 per cent. of the nation's work force—and it is widely spread throughout the country. With its counterparts in other Western countries, in recent years it has experienced an exceptionally rapid period of change, as the entry of new suppliers into the world market has coincided with rapid technological advance. That combination of exceptional changes justified the exceptional step of suspending the internationally agreed trade rules for a time, so that discriminatory import quotas could be lawfully imposed to give the industry in this and other countries a breathing space in which to adjust.

Now, after a difficult period at the beginning of the decade, when one job in three was lost and in which output declined, we are witnessing a healthy recovery. The industry's output has been growing for four years and the export record is impressive. During the first 11 months of 1985, textile exports were 15 per cent. higher than in the same period in 1984. Those percentages can be measured in billions of pounds. Perhaps most striking of all is the fact that our exports of woollen and worsted fabrics to Japan — notoriously a difficult market — increased by more than 26 per cent. in the first 11 months of 1985 compared with the same period in 1984, and that Japan is our biggest market for such textiles.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I am delighted to hear that my hon. Friend will put the interests of United Kingdom citizens first. Does he accept that, welcome though his figures are, they come from a low base? I should not like those figures to lull him into a false sense of security.

Mr. Clark: I am obliged for my hon. Friend's words of caution. However, when I cited the percentages, I said that they can be measured in billions of pounds. This is a technical subject and there is little scope for flights of oratory. I have deliberately excluded from my speech a mass of figures. Although I agree that percentage increases from a low base can be misleading, textile exports in 1985 were £1·3 billion, and clothing exports were more than £1 billion. Whatever the base, my hon. Friend must agree that those figures are impressive.

I cite those figures as a tribute to the tremendous effort that has gone into changing our industry into a more specialised one, meeting competition by selling products on the strength of their quality and design.

When trade restrictions are at issue, we must consider their effects not only on the industry protected by them, but on the economy at large. The indirect economic effects are spread thinly but widely; it is hard to measure them, but wrong to ignore them. Several economic studies have examined them, including the Silberston report commissioned by my Department, and other studies carried out by OECD and the Trade Policy Research Centre. They point out that curtailing the consumer's freedom of choice increases prices. We must remember that the consumer is often another industry: for example, textiles are consumed by clothing firms.

The studies say that the greater part of the additional revenues attracted from consumers often accrues to the benefit of foreign suppliers rather than British ones. They also say that although trade restrictions can save jobs in the industry concerned, they may not necessarily have that effect in the economy at large. Plainly, higher prices for the products of one industry leave consumers with less money to spend on those of others. I accept that trade restrictions cast a long shadow, which often falls in unexpected places.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the burden would fall very heavily on some parts of the country if we weakened the multi-fibre arrangement too much? The clothing industry is already introducing much new technology, which does not allow the industry to take on much extra labour. Whatever might be the extra input to the economy as a whole, any weakening would damage areas where there are few alternative jobs. There would be no increase in jobs or new industries in areas where textiles are concentrated.

Mr. Clark: I have already said that I have no intention of getting rid of the arrangement until I am satisfied that

[Mr. Clark]

the safeguards that it provides are no longer needed. I would not wish to use the word "weakening", but we are contemplating some changes. I shall be interested to hear my hon. Friend's comments on them.

Most of the competition comes from within the European Community. Imports account for 40 per cent. of British consumers' expenditure on textiles and clothing. Of that, 24 per cent. comes from our Community partners, compared with 10 per cent. from the developing countries covered by the arrangement.

Most Community supplies now enter free of all restraint, and so, after the end of 1989, will supplies from Spain and Portugal. Some of the most formidable low-cost competitors will then have free access to our market, which is already open to some of the most formidable high-value competitors.

Hon. Members will know, as I stated at Question Time yesterday, that it is the Community, and not individual member states, which negotiates on the EC's external trade policy. It is therefore through the Community that the United Kingdom will be negotiating in the GATT to renew the MFA. The Council of Ministers will be deciding, in the Foreign Affairs Council, the Community's negotiating mandate. In that process, the British voice is one of 12, and my intention is that it will be persuasive.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As my hon. Friend has particular responsibility for looking after, I do not say safeguarding, the interests of 500,000 people who work in the textiles and clothing industries, will he seek to influence my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and the business managers of this place to ensure that this matter will come to the House again before he finally negotiates a mandate with the European Community? The House, and not just the Minister, should seek to represent the best interests of the British people.

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend's comments will have been heard by the business managers, who are present. I believe that today's debate is a step in that direction, and I look forward with great interest to hearing my hon. Friend's comments. Certainly it might be appropriate at a later stage, when the mandate is in a more tangible form, for the House to re-examine the matter, but that is not a matter for me to judge.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): In view of concern of textile trade unions about the 500 jobs a week that have been lost during the lifetime of the present MFA, will the Minister give an undertaking that he will meet the unions before the mandate is finalised, so that he can hear their views, because, to judge from what he has said today and earlier, I suspect that he is not fully aware of them?

Mr. Clark: I would like to think that I am well aware of their views, although as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have been in this post for only 10 days.

The first thing that strikes me about the trade unions' views is that they are not unanimous. They express different views, and there is a conflict of opinion and approach between them. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot——

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Clark: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, although I have given way four times already.

Mr. Straw: The Opposition are glad to learn of the Minister's resolve to defend the interests of the textile industry.

I should like to correct the Minister on his point about the trade unions. Hon. Members on both sides of the House who represent constituencies with textile industries would say that the textile trade unions have always worked in concert and with the British Textile Confederation, and employers and have put up a united and sensible front to defend the best interests of the industry.

Mr. Clark: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman and to the House if I inadvertently cast aspersions on the united front which the trade unions display in these matters. However, I think that some trade unions, possibly not in the textile industry, were urging us to admit imports from Bangladesh, on the ground that their exclusion created social deprivation in that country. There has been a certain amount of dabbling by trade unions in an attempt to regulate or combine social conditions with acceptance of quotas and so forth. The front that the trade unions present is not entirely harmonious, but perhaps the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will develop that point if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Simultaneously with the negotiations in the GATT to renew the MFA, a preparatory committee is meeting to arrange the launching of a new GATT round of multilateral trade negotiations. That will be the first such round since the Tokyo round was launched in 1973.

I invite the House to consider the position in the GATT of the newly industrialised countries. They benefit greatly from their access to developed countries' markets, while enjoying the same exemption as the poorest developing countries from the requirement to reciprocate that access by opening their own markets. In the long run, the future of the MFA and the integration of the newly industrialised countries into the GATT system are similar issues.

The Government are convinced that the Community must be willing to negotiate these two issues together in the new GATT round, and that we must make that clear to the developing world when an extension of the MFA is sought this year. Indeed, nothing has raised sharper questions about the wider international effects of the MFA than the debate, as I mentioned to the hon. Member for Blackburn a moment ago, over its application last year to Bangladesh.

No fewer than 81 hon. Members have written to Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry about that. I understand the questions that they raised about a system that allows rich countries to discriminate against textile imports from the poorest countries, while continuing to trade amongst themselves on the non-discriminatory terms enjoyed by the GATT. I understand, too, the problem of how developing countries are to repay their debts, often to our own banks, if they cannot sell us the goods that they make best. All these arguments add to the complexity of the Government's dilemma.

The Government's objectives remain broadly as they were set out by my predecessor in the House on 9 May 1985. They are, first, to seek a renewal of the arrangement for a further transitional period because it is inappropriate, as I said at the outset, to dispense with a sudden jolt, with

the safeguards that it provides. These safeguards must be maintained, but perhaps focused more accurately on those sections of the industry that need it most.

Secondly, we should consider liberalising in several respects: for example children's clothes, quotas which are disproportionately costly in relation to the amounts of British production protected, the poorest developing countries and those which maintain low barriers to British exports.

All that must be set in an explicit long-term context which looks to the new GATT round as the forum in which the MFA, like other exceptions from the normal rules of the GATT, should be put on the table for negotiation, with the aim of getting those rules more widely and consistently respected. Finally, the state trading countries should continue to be handled differently from market economy countries in ways appropriate to their trading systems.

Let me briefly review events since that debate in May last year. Last July the Community made a declaration in the GATT textile committee, with the approval of the Community's own Council, calling for a renewal of the MFA on a more flexible basis and recognising the close links between this question and the efforts then being made to launch a new GATT round.

In December the Commission made a proposal to the Council of Ministers as to what the Community's negotiating mandate should be. It issued a lengthy press notice, which is in the Library of the House, and hon. Members may consult it and derive some idea of the Commission's view of the mandate.

We start in earnest with the negotiations at the GATT textile committee on 3 April. In the meantime, there has been some preliminary discussion in Brussels among Community Ministers as well as technical discussion among officials. Some countries are reluctant to countenance much, if any, liberalisation. Others are arguing for a firm commitment to phase out the MFA. British spokesmen have continued to advocate the strategy that has been set before the House. My Department has throughout kept in close touch with the main trade associations representing the British industry, with the TUC, and with consumers' and distributors' organisations.

In his speech to the House in May, my predecessor took the view that the Community's position would, in the nature of things, evolve to take account of the positions of other major participants and that the position of the United States would obviously be especially important. Since that time the President has vetoed the Jenkins Bill, which, if it had been enacted, would have been a major protectionist step.

The President announced that the United States would most aggressively renegotiate the new MFA. The detail of the United States' approach to the negotiations is not yet clear. The recent renegotiations of existing United States bilateral agreements have allowed for a growth of imports, on average, of around 6 per cent.

I shall mention a few points which are under debate in Brussels and on which I look forward to hearing hon. Members views. First, there is the level of growth rates and whether the so-called dominant suppliers, of which Hong Kong is the most important, should be treated less favourably than other countries. Secondly, there is the question of the extent to which the Community can expect a degree of reciprocity in return for any liberalisation provided. Thirdly, there is the basket exit mechanism.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): The basket extractor.

Mr. Clark: The basket extractor — the hon. Gentleman is correct. To be honest, it is a term of such hideous jargon that I regret that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is not in the Chamber, because were she here I could express by my tone the distaste that I feel for that piece of jargon, and she might repeat some of the accusations that she has made against me previously. I should be glad if hon. Members came forward with suggestions as to how that ludicrous term, which has somehow slipped into the parlance of the arrangement, could be made into a more intelligible title.

The fourth point is whether the arrangement can, or should, be used as an instrument for influencing social policies within developing countries.

On each of those points we must bear in mind what is negotiable and what is desirable, and, no less important, the balance that must be struck between the textile industry's interests and those of our trade more generally.

I should like to set the debate in the context of free trade versus protectionism. I do not see them as mutually exclusive alternatives which preclude any other approach. I recognise that the attainment of a genuinely free trade society is an admirable long-term objective, but Governments must negotiate in the real world, and in the real world free trade, like unilateral disarmament, is fine —*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends will understand that I had to attack the allegiance of Opposition Members.

Free trade is fine if everyone else allows it, but if we try to achieve it by example alone it may be dangerous and even damaging. The hard-headed bargaining of reciprocal advantage and concession in an atmosphere of mutual respect is completely different from protectionism. Any Government who ignore that principle in obeisance to some abstract credo — is it ignored by our principal trading competitors, the Americans, the Japanese, and the French, who are the arch practitioners of that doctrine? —are in derogation of their duty to their people. I shall be adopting that approach in the MFA negotiations, and it is one which I invite the whole House to endorse.

4.23 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I shall begin by welcoming the Minister to his new responsibilities and especially to this subject. He brings to the MFA negotiations an enviable reputation as someone who is ready to put the national interest first. The Opposition hope that he will maintain and build upon that reputation.

At times during the Minister's speech, we were encouraged—in particular, when he departed from his text rather than when he read from it—that he would enhance that reputation.

I urge the Minister not to feel any obligation to learn the art of speaking backwards which is, I believe, a talent much prized by some of his ministerial colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry. We should like him to carry on speaking in much the same direction, on this subject, as he has done in the past.

The debate is welcome. We are grateful to the Government for having made time for it. It comes at a crucial time. We know that the EEC negotiating mandate is to be concluded, if the Commission has its way, by the end of the month. We shall say something about whether that timetable is appropriate. It means that it is important that the House has an opportunity to express a view now

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as to what we know of the likely content of that negotiating mandate, because once agreed—I take the point made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) about the desirability of another debate—that will be that. The Government will say, "We have no further part to play."

Once that has happened, we shall have determined the future of what is universally regarded as one of our most important industries. I need not rehearse all the facts. The importance of the industry is common ground.

We know that the outcome of the negotiations matters crucially to nearly 500,000 employees in this country. That is nearly one in 10 of all those who work in manufacturing in Britain.

As I think the Minister was reminded by one of his hon. Friends yesterday, that total exceeds the combined totals of those who work in the coal and steel industries. It is valuable employment, as has been said many times. It is important from a social and regional viewpoint because of the heavy concentraton of jobs for women and members of the ethnic minorities. Those jobs matter. No Government could responsibly gamble with them.

The arrangement is not just important to the employees. The employers have a creditable investment record. They need to know the industry's future shape and prospects before they embark on yet another round of greatly needed investment.

The Opposition take little comfort from and have little confidence in the Government's overall attitude when we consider what Ministers have said from time to time about the importance of manufacturing. We are alarmed by the carelessness and lack of interest with which the Government have so often regarded the collapse of this or that part of our manufacturing base. Over the past month or two, the country has watched what has happened to sectors of our car and helicopter industries. The attitudes displayed and the policies implemented give us little confidence that the Government are serious about maintaining the base of our manufacturing capacity.

The Opposition—I believe that we may have strong support from Conservative Members—are determined that what has happened to our car, helicopter and other industries shall not happen to the textile industry. The threat is not that someone will come from abroad and buy the best and juiciest bits, it is merely that the industry will fade away and be ground down by the rising tide of imports.

One of the problems that we face—the Minister was fair in conceding the point—is the difficulty we have when we get at this Government, because they are merely one of 12 partners negotiating in Brussels. The Minister was at his most persuasive and engaging when he assured us that that one voice would be a strong one. Nevertheless, all too often there are opportunities for Ministers to slip out from behind their responsibilities and say that it is nothing to do with them—"It is all to do with those wicked people in Brussels. We had to agree this or that concession."

We will not accept that. We believe that the Government and the Mininster have a clear and direct responsibility for what is agreed in Brussels. I pause only to remark upon the irony, which the Minister appreciates, that we have handed to the EEC the unique right to negotiate on our behalf in trade matters such as this. When one considers the level of EEC imports, which have done so much damage to our industry, one can only reflect that it is rather like handing over the keys to one's house to someone who has just burgled it. I believe that that is our present situation.

Sir Adam Butler (Bosworth): That is a fallacious argument. If we were to negotiate on our own with the various under-developed countries we would get nowhere near as good a bargain as the EEC, with its bargaining power, can obtain for the United Kingdom and other members.

Mr. Gould: Negotiations of a bilateral nature will take place and that is one of the problems to which I shall refer. Once we have agreed, in the unsatisfactory forum, an umbrella agreement, we shall then have a whole series of bilateral negotiations to undertake within that umbrella.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does my hon. Friend think there is anything in the reports emanating from Brussels that our officials are trying to weaken the multi-fibre agreement? Why is the Common Market hurrying these negotiations when the Americans have not decided their position?

Mr. Gould: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall deal with his first point a little later but his point about the timing is something to which the Government should address themselves. The Minister may say that he has difficulties in negotiating an overall agreement, but it is perfectly clear he has great control—if only from a negative viewpoint — over the timing of these negotiations. If the Commission is trying to rush us into a final agreement by the end of the month—which, as I hope to show, will not be in our best interests—I hope that the Minister will recognise he has a veto over that process. He can drag his heels. The Minister may need a great deal of political will to get away with it but he could do so.

There is a suspicion that the Commission for reasons of its own, perhaps for administrative convenience, is rushing ahead with these negotiations and trying to reach a final agreement much sooner than is in our interests. Why are we in such a hurry to reach an agreement when Spain and Portugal, major elements in the negotiatons, have only just acceded to membership? They have had hardly any opportunity to make a proper contribution to the new regime. Portugal has been so alarmed at what it perceives to be the likely contents of the negotiating mandate that it has threatened to ask for renegotiation of its own transitional entry terms to the subject. That is one good reason for taking our time.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) pointed out there is the position of the United States to consider. The position which the United States finally takes up will be a major factor in the eventual negotiations. We know that the United States position is likely to be fairly restrictive. We know that it is likely to want quota cuts from the dominants, that it will want an extension of the product cover for the new MFA and that it will wish to tie quota growth to market growth. The United States will wish to tighten—here I agree with the Minister in his diatribe against the expression — its equivalent to the basket extractor mechanism.

As the Minister correctly pointed out, following the veto by the President of the Commission of the Jenkins

Bill, we had a strong statement from the President about the aggressive stance which the United States had taken. Contrary to what the President said about the American stance on bilateral negotiations, the evidence shows that in their negotiations, with the Japanese on a bilateral agreement it will take a tough line.

If this is true, we are taking a grave risk in setting a concrete negotiation position which is markedly more liberal that the American position. The result of an MFA in which the Americans take tough action but we take weak action is that there will be a substantial diversion of exports from the American market into the less protected market—the United Kingdom. This is a major reason for taking our time and I urge the Minister to bear that factor in mind.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): It is a good idea to bide time. Unfortunately, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, the present GATT arrangement expires in July this year. It is important to make sure that the Government are properly and well-prepared in time.

Mr. Gould: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman. There is a timetable to which we must adhere but there is no point in getting out ahead of the Americans. We should try to co-ordinate it so that we do not simply establish our position without reference to what we believe the American position will be.

It is puzzling that, long before we had even agreed a negotiation mandate for the MFA, the Commission was intent on pressing ahead with bilateral negotiations. These agreements do not expire until the end of the year—we have plenty of time. Why are we pressing ahead with those negotiations without knowing the shape of the umbrella under which they will take place? Again the suspicion must be that the purpose of the Commission in pursuing bilateral negotiations is to try to establish, through the sequence of negotiations, a fait accompli — greater liberalisation irrespective of the outcome of the MFA negotiations.

If the Government are prepared to go along with that one is bound to look suspiciously and cynically at their assurances to the House and to the industry that they are intent on providing a proper measure of protection.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He mentioned a fait accompli and that is a term that sends a cold shiver down the spines of those engaged in the great industries which we lumped together as textiles. The hon. Gentleman has been eloquent on the complexity of the distinct stages of these negotiations—most of which take place far away from the ears of the British media. Will the official Opposition, with their influence on the business of the House, do their best to insist that each distinct stage is given a full statement and preferably a debate on the Government's intentions?

Mr. Gould: Of course I am happy to give that assurance and to point out that this debate takes place after a formal request by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) that the Government should provide time for it. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman said that the official Opposition would have to take responsibility for these matters as it is perfectly clear that the remainder of the Opposition, especially the Liberal party, are utterly split between the Yeovil tendency and the Rochdale factor. They are certainly not able to present a united front on this issue.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I must press on as I have taken up much time.

It is bad negotiating practice to reveal one's negotiation position sooner than is necessary. It calls to mind the Government's earlier and substantial mistake —admittedly under different management—when they commissioned and published the Silberston report. Apart from its merits or demerits—it is widely regarded as a shoddy piece of work—the publication of that report was the worst thing to do when we were preparing for international negotiations. We handed over to our negotiating partners a document which made the case against us. I cannot believe that the Government would wish to repeat that mistake.

What are the contents of the EEC negotiating mandate? We have not been privy to the negotiations and we have not seen any official reports or documents. However, Brussels leaks rather as Whitehall leaks, but perhaps not in quite such dramatic circumstances.

We have seen some evidence of what the mandate might contain, and what we have seen is extremely worrying. The Minister has said that he is contemplating some form of liberalisation, but let us bear in mind that any liberalisation will mean an increase in the level of imports, which is already 45 per cent. Every percentage point increase will put more of our textile workers out of work. Even during the term of MFA 3, 2,100 jobs were lost in the industry during each month that the agreement ran. That is the measure of the risk that we are taking by even thinking of further liberalisation.

Mr. Fallon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Commission is favouring liberalisation and in so doing appears to be the only party in the entire debate that is thinking of consumer interests? Is there not significant evidence in the Silberston report, from the Consumers Association and from the trade policy research centre that the MFA is a tax of 15 per cent. on clothing prices and 17 per cent. on children's clothing prices, and that it is costing every household in Britain this year about £377 whether or not it buys clothing?

Mr. Gould: I rather regret having given way to the hon. Gentleman. He has advanced the classic argument which ignores the fact that the consumer, who is believed to have a miraculous separate existence, is someone who depends for his livelihood, either directly or indirectly, on workers in the industries that we are trying to protect.

That which we know about the content of the negotiating mandate is worrying. Quota growth for group 1 products is to be even higher than the presumed and projected market growth. The quotas for other products will be allowed to grow by 6 per cent. No attempt will be made to re-base quotas on import levels as the TUC had recommended. If that had been done, there might have been room for greater flexibility on quota growth. Unfortunately, that has not been done. No attempt has been made to make room for concessions to the poorest suppliers by requiring cuts of the dominant suppliers. The possibility of using the MFA, as we would wish, to increase the export opportunities of the poorest countries

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—for example, Bangladesh — has not materialised because of the shortcomings of the Commission in framing the document.

Lip service only has been paid to the social development clause. It is there and it is mentioned, but only in terms that make it crystal clear that at the slightest hint of opposition, which the Commission no doubt fully expects, the Commission will run away from the commitment. As the Minister said, the approach to reciprocity is extremely weak-kneed. It is only half-hearted. There is no likelihood that the Commission will even raise the matter with the bilaterals in the negotiations that it will conduct.

The quota transfer arrangements within the EEC are a source of great concern. Unfortunately, the issue has become tied up in some way with the anxiety about completing the internal market. As the quotas are transferred, there is a real possibility that a country such as Britain will find that quota levels will be exceeded by anything up to 13 per cent.

There was no attempt to deal with the continuing problem of quota overhang. Neither was there any attempt to replace the admittedly ineffective anti-surge mechanism. All that we are offered or promised is a vague consultation clause.

Finally, I turn to our old friend the basket extractor mechanism, which is to be relaxed instead of being made more effective. The Government intend to argue—the Minister reflected the intention to some degree—for a position that comes between two extremes in the EEC negotiations. The Dutch, the Danes and the Germans want liberalisation while the French, the Italians, the Portuguese and the Belgians want an effective MFA. It seems that we are virtuously steering a middle course, and it is said that that is a sign that we are getting things about right. It is an example of the typical British compromise. I do not accept that that is an adequate or effective stance for our negotiators to take.

We are not in a weak position in these negotiations. We can determine their outcome by placing our weight on one side or the other. Indeed, we are in an immensely powerful position. If the Minister is to remain true to what he and his ministerial colleagues have assured the House, which is that they want to see an effective renewal of the MFA, they will make it clear in Brussels that they side with those who, quite properly, in their own interests and in the interests of the EEC, will insist on an effective renewal of the MFA.

There is a problem, and it is one that causes many of us to be suspicious. Whenever a Minister repeats the pledge which was given on 9 May 1985 that the Government are committed to an effective renewal of the MFA, we hear strong and persistent reports from many sources in Brussels that those who are in the van of the pressure to liberalise the MFA are the British officials. We require the clearest possible assurance from the Minister when he replies that our officials are not acting under ministerial instructions and that they, to the extent that they have earned this reputation, will be brought to heel smartly by the Minister's responses.

I shall conclude by asking the Minister a specific question. Now that we know the likely shape of the EEC negotiating mandate, has any proper job assessment been carried out of the consequences of employment in Britain? If the answer is no, the Government are acting irresponsibly. We cannot afford further job losses in a hard-pressed industry. We must know what the job consequences will be. It is all very well talking in general terms about the benefit to the consumer, but that does not cut much ice with those whose jobs are on the line.

The Minister is refreshingly free of the free-trade theology which has marked so much of his Department's policy-making in this area over the past year or two. He talked about free trade and unilateral disarmament as though they were different phenomena. I would argue that free trade is unilateral disarmament, and that is exactly what we want to avoid. If the Minister says that there is comparability in that sense, I shall agree with him.

We shall accept no excuses from the Government or the Minister about the difficulty of negotiating in Brussels. We believe that the hon. Gentleman has every opportunity to defend the national interest. We believe also that we are entitled to judge him on the results that he achieves in Brussels. We have hopes that he will enhance his reputation for fighting for the national interest. We hope that he will fight for the British textile industry in the negotiations, and we urge him to do just that.

4.48 pm

Sir Adam Butler (Bosworth): It is appropriate to congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade on what I take it is his maiden speech in his new capacity. He delivered it in a refreshing manner, and rather blushingly at times. He will have to become all too used to the strange phrases to which some of us have been accustomed for some time. When he debates these issues in the Council of Ministers he will find them highly complex, but I know that he will be up to the task.

When I first started taking part in textile debates in the House some few years ago, I used to declare that I had been an employee in the textile industry. Indeed, I was an employee at that time, but that is no longer the case. A much more important interest to declare now, as then, is the interests of my constituents.

Despite the ravages of the past few years, which have hit the east midlands and Leicestershire as hard as anywhere else in the textile industry, hosiery and knitwear remains the principal industry in my constituency. I should like to spend a long while talking about the subject, but I assure the House, and especially my hon. Friends, who by their numbers demonstrated the importance of the debate, that the brevity of my speech will be in inverse ratio to the importance of the matters that we are debating.

The companies in my constituency, like the industry as a whole, have shown remarkable resilience over the past years. They have shown an ability to adapt and survive. The fashion knitwear industry, for instance, through greatly improved design—perhaps we might say at long last—and the use of up-to-date machinery, has shown that it can compete with the best in the world.

In some sectors there is evidence of growth in order books, high levels of activity and prosperity. However, that prosperity is selective and fragile. There is little or no confidence in the future. It is important that there is not enough confidence to encourage long-term investment. Where prosperity exists, it must not be allowed to distract us from the casualties of recent years—for example, the thousands of workers in the industry who have lost their jobs and the hundreds of companies, especially small

family ones, which have gone under. The knitted underwear sector, for example, has been especially hard hit and remains very much at risk.

The MFA has undoubtedly helped in easing the transition and ameliorating the worst effects of imports from low-cost countries. Its continuation is welcomed. There were many parts in my hon. Friend's speech which I found most helpful, but the terms of that next arrangement continue to give us concern. It is the uncertainty about them and the Government's talk of liberalisation which serves to undermine confidence and make company boards hesitant about investment.

There are many aspects of the new arrangement which demand attention, but I do not intend to dwell on those. Other Members may deal with the need for more effective machinery to deal with a surge in imports, perhaps from a totally new country of origin, and to deal with that surge swiftly.

There is the question of preferential treatment for those exporting countries which give comparable access. There is the very important question of no switching of quotas between EEC countries. Indeed, there is the wider problem of outward processing by other EEC countries, and it is from that cause that much of the increase in imports from within the EEC has arisen. Others have already referred to the importance of comparability with American practice. There is all that and much more.

There is talk of greater liberalisation. The present and former arrangements are liberal. The whole concept of the MFA is not to achieve rigid protectionism, but to control the rate of increase in certain sensitive items. The MFA gives guaranteed and growing access to clothing and textile imports from developing countries. The industry is not arguing for that growing access to be reduced. However, that growth rate is significantly higher than the growth in domestic demand, which historically has been less than 0·5 per cent. per annum in the last seven years or so.

What would be an act of irresponsibility, what would be damaging and grossly unfair to an industry which has demonstrated its adaptability, and which has shown clearly that it can continue to make its contribution to the nation's economy and to employment, would be for growth rates —that is, the rate of annual increase in imports of sensitive items — to be increased. Liberalisation is already a basic feature of the MFA, but it is controlled liberalisation. To continue in a new arrangement with the same terms would in fact provide for further liberalisation. That, I believe, is acceptable. What is not acceptable is for the terms to be eased. What is also not acceptable is for the growth rates to be increased.

I hope that when winding up the debate my hon. Friend will give us a categorical assurance on that point and that my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will be as persuasive as he possibly can be in that direction in the Council of Ministers.

4.53 pm

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): I, too, welcome the latest Minister to assume responsibility for this matter. Those of us who have attended textile debates for some time know that Ministers come and go, perhaps with unfortunate frequency. The newest Minister has an engaging style and a refreshing approach to the matter. Whether that will ensure a longer tenure of office looking after textiles I do not know, but I trust so. I hope that he is still the responsible Minister when the matter comes to fruition and all that he has told us today has been carried out.

The Minister said that the industry is an important one, employing 500,000 people, or 2 per cent. of the working population. Two per cent. does not sound very much, but those 500,000 people are heavily concentrated in certain areas. Sections of the industry are even more heavily concentrated in areas such as Oldham, my constituency.

The Minister will know, I am sure, that Oldham has been famous over the years for its part in the spinning section of the industry. I wonder whether the Minister had the opportunity of seeing the BBC programme which dealt with the decline of the textile industry. It was produced originally about two years ago, but was shown again about a fortnight ago. If the Minister can get hold of a cassette of that, it would do him no harm to see it. Contrary to his suggestion that there has been a decline in the textile industry over about 10 years, the film shows that the decline in the textile industry has been going on very much longer that that—perhaps for half a century.

Anybody who saw the programme would come to the conclusion that under the MFA there cannot be a long-term solution to the problems. It is a temporary measure. One can, of course, discuss how long is temporary. I do not think that we have had it for long enough at present, and I should like to see a fairly lengthy renewal of the MFA, and perhaps another one after that.

Mr. Straw: While Oldham was known for its spinning, Blackburn was once the weaving centre of the world—indeed, it is still an important textile centre.

My hon. Friend referred to the long-term decline in the industry, and I share his view that there has been a long-term decline as other countries have become industrialised. Does he agree that, in terms of output and employment, what has happened since 1980 in the textile industry has been of a different magnitude from anything experienced by the industry in the post-war period? Two hundred thousand jobs have been lost, which is catastrophic.

Mr. Lamond: I do not deny that it is catastrophic, and I fully support the point made by my hon. Friend.

If I may make a couple of constituency points, the first is that investment is taking place in the industry. Because of the resurgence which the Minister mentioned, there is a fragile recovery in the industry, although not very strong at present. It needs to be supported, and therefore we welcome the debate today.

Three weeks ago Courtaulds announced an investment of £4·5 million in re-equipping a maple mill in my constituency. I was present when the company made the press announcement, and we had a look at the mill. Although I warmly welcomed the investment and the confidence that that showed, unfortunately it has resulted in a net reduction of 150 jobs in the industry in my constituency. This does not mean that 150 people will lose their jobs immediately—they will be found some work —but ultimately there will be a net loss. It is important to take that into consideration. Part of the problem is that trying to keep up with modern technology may ultimately mean a reduction in jobs.

I have mentioned that cotton spinning is particularly important in Oldham. Among the many representations

[Mr. Lamond]

which we will all have received, I have received a note from the British Textile Employers Association in Manchester saying:

"The UK Government has consistently regarded the cotton yarn spinning sector as being highly sensitive. It is regionally concentrated in the North of the Greater Manchester area and in South East Lancashire, largely in towns with few alternative employment opportunities. Unemployment in the main areas of cotton yarn production in November 1985 was above the national average."

The note gives the example of Oldham as having unemployment of more than 14 per cent.

The association continued:

"The sensitivity of the sector is increased by its position as the first stage of the production chain. Cotton yarn producers are affected not only by imports of cotton yarn but also by imports of clothing, household textiles and fabric, which reduce their potential market."

Their position in the textile stream makes them particularly vulnerable. I hope that the Minister will keep that in mind and ensure that the negotiators are aware of it.

The secretary of the Oldham and Rochdale Textile Employers Association, Mr. John Longworth, is well known to many of us and happens to be the efficient secretary of the textile industry support campaign. He writes:

"Under the present MFA there is a formula known as the burden sharing formula which aims at a fairer sharing of imports amongst the members of the European Community. It is arrived at by the comparing the size of each member state and its historic import levels.

In the past cotton yarn imports into the UK have been given special consideration because of the comparatively high contraction rate in the UK spinning industry and also because of the very high level of cloth imports which have affected upstream spinners just as significantly as direct yarn imports.

Our information concerning the mandate for renewal of the MFA later this year, indicates that the need to continue the existing provision for yarn imports into the UK has been overlooked."

I hope that the Minister will inquire into that matter, to ensure that it has not been overlooked and that it is written into the mandate with which our negotiators will go forward.

Mr. Longworth continues:

"May I suggest that if you get an opportunity to speak in the debate tomorrow you might make reference to the need to continue the special provision for yarn. This is most important for Oldham which still has the highest concentration of cotton spinning in the UK."

I know that these negotiations are complex, and difficult for anyone who is not immersed in them as a negotiator to understand. The basket extractor mechanism and the rest sound technical, but they are extremely important in some areas. It is difficult to over-emphasise the anxiety of employers and employees about the future, and therefore these matters must not be overlooked.

There is a feeling in the textile industry that our negotiators are taking a leading role in trying to liberalise the MFA. That has been reflected in letters that I have received from employers in my area, some of them very prominent. I have raised the matter with Ministers on several occasions — not, of course, with the present Minister — because employers have expressed their concern about how our negotiators are considering this matter.

I have already suggested that the Minister might benefit from watching a video recording of a BBC2 programme about textiles. If the Minister has not had the opportunity —he cannot do everything at once and he has been in the job for only 10 days—he should read carefully the Trades Union Congress statement on MFA 4 entitled "A Fair Balance in Textile and Clothing Trade." He would find that what he said earlier was mistaken. There is harmony among the trade unions. Their attitude is not based simply on self-preservation and a selfish interest in their own jobs. The pamphlet deals sympathetically with the need to encourage growth in the textile industries in developing countries. The trade unions do not dismiss that aspect of the debate.

I sympathise with the Minister. Of course he has a difficult job trying to balance all these considerations. I am sure that he also received a letter from the world development movement. Anyone who wants to take a reasonable view of the negotiations must take account of its arguments. During the past eight years the Third world's share of United Kingdom imports of textiles and clothing has dropped from 34·5 to 27·5 per cent. We have to take account of that. Those figures include the market share of the poorest developing countries, such as India and Bangladesh, which fell from 7 to 5 per cent. Those are important matters that must be balanced against the protection of jobs in Britain.

The trade union movement has not overlooked that—far from it. It says in its pamphlet:

"The restrictions under MFA 4 should be set at levels which ensure that the market access for imports from *all* low cost sources (including the preferential countries) grows at the likely 1-2 per cent. rate of expansion of the EC market. Again, preference should be given to the least developed suppliers in allowing them higher growth rates in exchange for lower growth for the dominant suppliers."

That reflects the anxiety that has been expressed in the world development movement and, from time to time, by hon. Members. Some of us are anxious that the poorest countries should be given an opportunity to bring their economies up to a reasonable level. I hope the Minister does not think that those of us who speak with a strong constituency interest do not share that view.

There is a paragraph in the trade union pamphlet which the Minister might not find very acceptable, as he said something a little disparaging about those who want to mix free trade with interfering with social conditions in other countries. I do not agree with him. If we are to sacrifice jobs—which is what happens ultimately—we have some right to say that there should be some social change in the countries that are to benefit. We do not ask for change in the system or type of government, but we do ask for a change in the organisation of labour, for example.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I should like to take the hon. Gentleman to task for what he described as the world development movement's stance. He misrepresented it slightly. He talked of just the poorest countries, but the movement favours "positive discrimination in favour of imports from developing countries especially the poorest." The movement talks of all, not just the poorest.

Mr. Lamond: I would not want to misrepresent anything, and I accept what the hon. Gentleman has said. When I read from the trade union pamphlet, I quoted that part which said "the least developed". Far be it from me to misrepresent, or even to try to speak on behalf of, the world development movement. I am doing my best to protect the interests of working people in my constituency, as they would expect.

The TUC pamphlet says:

"The TUC is proposing that a new Article should be written into the MFA to encourage social development in member countries, building on the reference to this acknowledged objective contained in Article 1 of the existing MFA."

In the existing MFA we have the seeds of that idea. If we accept, as I do, that the MFA is not simply a mechanism for restricting imports, but is already a liberal arrangement which recognises the need for some countries to expand their exports, we will make much more progress in the negotiations.

The Minister should consider the arrangement positively. He should regard it, not as restrictive, but as a means of assisting the poorer countries, which desperately need our help. That can be done with the full support of the trade unions, provided their pamphlet is taken into consideration.

5.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): This is a vital debate. We are concerned about the employment of 500,000 people in an industry which is our fourth largest employer. As we have heard from the Minister and others, the industry is larger than the coal and steel industries put together, twice the size of the aerospace industry and two and a half times the size of the computer and office equipment industry. Therefore, we are talking about a very important part of the manufacturing base of the United Kingdom.

The instincts of my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade are good. He is so much better when he speaks from the heart than when he speaks from the notes produced by the Department of Trade and Industry. My hon. Friend came across loud and clear and genuinely and sincerely when he departed from the bureaucratic notes that had been prepared for him. He should be his instinctive, sensible self more often and should not be influenced by the restrictions and limitations placed upon him by officials in his Department who are extremely well paid but who will not be affected in any way by the decisions that they make. I do not mean any disrespect to those who may not be in the Chamber but who can hear my remarks when I say that we have a duty to represent the best interests of the people.

How right my hon. Friend was to point out that free trade is an ideal theory but that in practice it does not work because nobody else practises it. Too often in the past, and not just in textiles and clothing, we have been the soft touch and have lost out.

For too long it has been argued by some of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friends the Members for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), that the textile and clothing industry has been inefficient, overmanned and reluctant to introduce new technology and equipment, and that it is producing over-priced products that are protected from international competition by the multi-fibre arrangement. That is not a true picture of the industry.

Mr. Fallon *rose*——

Mr. Winterton: I shall not give way to my hon. Friend. I gave an assurance to the Chair that I would speak for only seven or eight minutes.

The industry has made impressive profits in recent years. Productivity per capita increased by 33 per cent. between 1980 and 1984 and a further increase is expected in the current year. Investment is running at £250 million per year. Of course, there will be more investment if the debate delivers the right message to the industry.

To put the reference to children's clothing in proper perspective, I shall quote from the *Employment Gazette* which shows the average percentage increase in the retail price index between January 1974, when the MFA became effective, and December 1985. In that period the price of children's clothing went up by 164 per cent. Some hon. Members may say that that was a substantial increase, but we should compare it with other increases in the same period. The price of bread went up by 243 per cent., potatoes by 333 per cent., beer by 407 per cent., rents by 317 per cent., rates and water by 440 per cent., electricity by 422 per cent., newspapers by 453 per cent. and postage by 370 per cent. The Government were partially responsible for some of those dramatic increases. The increase of 164 per cent. in the price of children's clothing is very modest in comparison with those other increases.

Mr. Fallon *rose*——

Mr. Winterton: I am not giving way.

The figures I have quoted show that the multi-fibre arrangement has been of great benefit to the industry and the country.

We are talking about a thriving, competitive industry which will continue to prosper if there is orderly marketing and the minimum of unfair competition. Output in 1985 amounted to £12,000 million and value added will exceed £4,500 million. That is a considerable achievement. Output could be higher if the unfair competition which the industry has faced for so many years is curbed. There should be much more reciprocity. How much I agree with many of the points made by the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond). We should seek to give business to the poor countries which do business with us and which would benefit from the opening of the British market. We should not just give quotas to the countries that are relatively affluent in comparison with many deprived countries.

The textile industry can make a major contribution to the economy, but the Minister should not overlook the fact that in the period from December 1978 to November 1985, for most of which the Conservative party was in power, employment in the textile and clothing industry dropped from just over 800,000 to just under 500,000. We have not had strikes or demonstrations. The industry is not irresponsible and the work force is not overpaid. The industry as a whole has invested and rationalised. It has sought to heed all the exhortations of successive Governments.

There is still muted optimism that the recovery can continue. Obviously the recovery of the last few years is welcome news. But how right my right hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Sir A. Butler) was when he said that the recovery is very fragile. The future of the industry will depend very much on the MFA.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend. Does he realise that thousands of people in my constituency depend upon the knitwear and clothing industry for employment? Would it be helpful for him to know that I support his view that we must have a renegotiated multi-fibre arrangement in the interests of my constituents as well?

Mr. Winterton: Having been to my hon. Friend's constituency and having met many of his constituents, I know that they respect the way in which he seeks to represent their views and to stand up for an industry which is vital not only to Sherwood and Nottingham but to the United Kingdom as a whole.

Although there is optimism, may I point out that production in the textile and clothing industry is lower than when the Government came to power in 1979? Ministers must not think that, because of the MFA, the industry is bursting at the seams, even though production is up. Yes, production has started to creep up in the last two or three years, but it is still lower than when we came to office in 1979.

What of the future of the industry? Surely it depends on continuing trends of product innovation and new technology, but both require confidence in the industry. On the BBC2 "Money Programme" on 2 February David Alliance of Vantona Viyella said of his company:

> "We have spent over £50 million in the last two years. We are prepared to spend a lot more—after we know the results of the MFA agreement."

That man is in every way the epitome of what the Government seek in industry. He is progressive and radical, introduces new technology, and is one of the largest and most important employers in the textile industry today. Yet that is the message that an industrialist, supporting the views of trade unions in the industry, delivered to the Government. Obviously, I support the broad principle of a free international market, but it must be free for all, not just every country but ours acting in its own interests.

I could refer to many matters about reciprocity, but I shall restrict myself to one or two. Fabric imports from Brazil to the United Kingdom are affected by a 13 per cent. level of duty only. When we send fabric to Brazil, it is subject to a levy of 105 per cent. Is that reciprocity? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not say that it is because we know that it is not. Garments from Brazil to the United Kingdom are subject to a Customs tariff of only 15 per cent., but those from the United Kingdom to Brazil are subject to 105 per cent. Indeed, most of our products outside textiles and clothing are probably banned altogether. Therefore, let us get an element of reciprocity. It is vital.

My hon. Friends and, to a limited extent, Opposition Members have touched on many other important matters, so I shall not cover the same ground. The outcome of the present MFA negotiations will affect the whole shape of the international textiles and clothing trade to the end of the century and, perhaps, well beyond. It will decide the future of the lives of about 500,000 people who work in the industry. How right the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton was to say that there is no point in divorcing the consumer from the equation because he is often also the employee. With no disrespect to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington, if there is no purchasing power in the United Kingdom, it does not matter from where a product comes because there will not be much of a market for it.

Damaging uncertainty needs to be resolved. We need a robust renewal of the MFA, which can be amended if there is no longer a supply of a particular commodity, fabric or yarn. Then we must amend the quotas so that the clothing industry—the other half of the textile-clothing formula—can obtain the good quality product that it needs to survive.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Winterton: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way because I hope to sit down within 30 seconds.

It is vital to the United Kingdom that the Government are seen to support the manufacturing base, which is the true creator of wealth. The present uncertainty in the industry must be resolved quickly. The European Economic Community's acceptance of any proposed changes to weaken the MFA must be abandoned, and our civil servants in Brussels must be given a clear mandate by Ministers to deliver today's message from the House.

The Government must not betray an industry which has been of such vital value to the United Kingdom, which heralded the industrial revolution, and which has brought power, influence and wealth to our nation. It is prepared to play that role in the future. The Government have the opportunity today to ensure that it does.

5.24 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): It is fair to say that my speech will not find favour with many hon. Members on either side of the House, and probably least of all with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). If the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) would like to intervene, I shall happily give way.

Mr. Gould: I am tempted to add to the list of those who will disagree with the hon. Gentleman, the names of some of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Ashdown: I hoped that the hon. Gentleman would make that comment, which is why I tempted him to the Dispatch Box. I should like to make it clear that the policy that I announced when last I spoke and which I shall repeat today is agreed by every alliance Member with one exception. On this occasion one may refer to him as the Militant Tendency of the Liberal party. The noble defence by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) of his constituents' interests is a matter for him which he has expressed clearly and pungently. It is no more accurate —indeed, it may be significantly less accurate—to say that the Liberal party is split because of his apostasy on the matter, than to say that the Conservative party is split because the hon. Member for Macclesfield disagrees with almost everything that his Front Bench says, or that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) should be held to account for the speeches of his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist).

Having said that what I shall say will find little favour, except perhaps with the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) and some other braver souls, I shall begin on points of common agreement. The textile and clothing industry is one of our greatest industries and our fourth largest. It has made phenomenal and significant strides forward in profitability and efficiency, and is to be greatly commended for that. Conservative Members may not agree but Labour Members may, that the most significant problem of the industry, in common with every other British industry, is that the Government have set out no framework, context or climate to encourage it. That

problem is infinitely bigger than any problems from which it may suffer from our continuance in or withdrawal from the MFA. There is no strategy for the textile industry.

I sometimes believe that hon. Members who have constituency points to make may be better advised to drive the Government and push the Labour party towards a genuine strategy for the textile industry.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in due course.

In the absence of any overall strategy for the textile industry, which, God knows, it deserves and badly needs, it is not surprising that many employers and union members clutch on to their one hope—the MFA. It is the one positive piece of policy for them to hang on to. It is not surprising that under those circumstances they elevate the MFA to a level which is not borne out by the facts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: If I may continue a little further, I shall give way, but the Minister's hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) should be allowed to intervene first.

I recognise the industry's fear. Lest I am charged with speaking in an airy-fairy way, the second largest employer in my constituency is directly involved in textile interests. I am well aware of those interests. Moreover, I know what it is like to have to fight for a constituency interest against the prevailing mood because I have had to do so during the past few months.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman will accept —indeed, he has already done so—that he will find little sympathy from either side of the House for the alliance case. Will he tell the House why he can defend his constituency interests in the Westland affair and speak in such pejorative terms about his hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith), who in our last debate did not merely speak for his constituents? The hon. Member for Rochdale said, in effect, that he was the only member of the alliance who knew anything about textiles. It is a great pity that he is not present today.

Mr. Ashdown: I have no doubt that there are many in this House who are sorry that he is not here today. I have to say quite bluntly that I am not one of them, although I recognise that he is a doughty defender of his constituents' interests. To answer the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, I sought to protect what I believed were the best interests of my constituents and the interests of Britain's defence industry as a whole, in the Westland affair. I seek now to argue a case which will be for the best long-term interests of my constituents — the second largest employer in my constituency is the textile industry —and of the industry as a whole in my capacity as my party's trade and industry spokesman. I think there will be more significant points about which hon. Members will disagree than this particular one.

Mr. Butcher: There is one point which the hon. Gentleman should expand upon. He said that there was no industrial strategy coming from the Conservative benches. I have asked this question before. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman might like to have another go at answering it today. Given that a fairly honest and accurate estimate of alliance policy implies an increase in public expenditure of about £8·5 billion, how would they propose to protect industry and commerce either through increasing their tax take, or an increase in interest rates?

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister tempts me to go broader than this debate, but let me dispose immediately of some of his arguments by saying that we in the alliance propose an overall increase in the public sector borrowing requirement, which may amount to £2 billion. This is similar to the amount the Government have overrun on PSBR already. The significant difference between us is not in terms of the size of those sums, but how they are disposed of. We would invest in Britain, and not pour the money in benefit down the bottomless pit of unemployment. If the Minister wants me to go into the detail of industrial policy, I would be straying much wider than this debate permits, but I will send him a recent pamphlet that I have written which will explain the situation much more clearly than I have time to do at present.

Those who are genuinely interested in this, one of the greatest industries of our nation and in the long-term jobs of those in the industry, workers who have done so well for Britain in the past, should press for a decent plan for textiles and for the EEC to develop its own plan for the industry. We have made great strides forward in efficiency, and we must consolidate them because in due course they will make the MFA unnecessary.

Allowing for transport costs, the West German industry, whose levels of efficiency we are fast approaching, would need only a 3 per cent. duty on yarn and a 12 per cent. duty on cloths now to be able to compete head to head with the Koreans. The United States industry needs no duty. That is what we should be working towards, and not seeking to place indefinite reliance on a protectionist trading mechanism that is bound to fall in due course.

Those hon. Gentlemen who argue for the continuance of the MFA into the distant future ignore the fact that reliance on it puts us in the hands of other nations as well as our own. Surely hon. Members who have the long-term interest of their constituents at heart should be seeking to make the industry efficient enough to be able to stand on its own feet without this kind of assistance.

Mr. Fallon *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I look for a long-term plan which would create a situation on which industry could rely, which is not in the hands of other nations and which would encourage the tremendous strides towards more competition and diversity. We shall also be encouraging the Government to be much stronger than they have been in terms of their reactions to the United States moves towards protectionism, which has so desperately affected the Scottish woollen industry in particular. It is within that overall context that we should look at the MFA.

There are three criteria by which we can judge our action. Firstly, is it effective as an instrument for allowing restructuring? Secondly, what are its effects in Britain and abroad? Thirdly, is there another way of helping the textile industry?

Let me take them in turn. Is it an effective instrument for restructuring? We have to recognise that the MFA is a major exception to the guiding principle of trade which underpins the GATT agreement, that of non-discrimination and of trading arrangements made on a

[Mr. Ashdown]

bilateral basis. We have to recognise that three quarters of our textile and clothing trade is outside the scope of the MFA. That non-MFA element is not diminishing, but is growing as a result of the MFA.

The amount of textile imports to Britain since 1974 has fallen from 27 to 24 per cent. There is no evidence there that the MFA is helping the restructuring of the clothing industry. It has not created the liberalisation of trade, which is supposed to have helped those areas of the world which have growing industries, nor has it achieved the restructuring of our own.

At best, there has been very little progress, and such progress as there has been is in the opposite direction. Yet we have an MFA which has been running for 16 years.

Secondly, I want to touch on its effects. I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Member for Darlington. There is incontrovertible evidence that the MFA has cost the consumer a considerable amount of money. I know that it has faults and flaws, but the basic premise put forward by the Silberston report is accurate and supportable, and it indicates that there is a very significant cost to the consumer. Th Consumers Association has said that the prices of imported jeans and shirts from Hong Kong may well have increased by up to 40 per cent. as a result of quota purchases and the MFA.

The trading policy research centre has said that MFA quotas put up the price to the consumer in 1982 by 15 per cent. in some sectors, particularly woven trousers, knitted blouses, woven shirts and so on.

Let me take the point made by the hon. Member for Dagenham. It is true that Britain does not consist only of consumers but also of people who are in employment. The total cost of that small sector—woven trousers, knitted blouses, woven shirts and other woven goods—to the consumer of a rise in prices of 15 per cent. in 1982 is calculated by the trading policy research centre to amount to £170 million. How much better for industry, and for jobs, if that money was to be put directly into the industry to help to create those jobs. It is a ludicrous misuse of money to make consumers pay more when the money is not used to assist industry directly. It seems to me that that is one of the arguments in favour of ensuring that the MFA does not continue indefinitely. Nor does that account for the other effects of the MFA which bring about reciprocal action by Third world parties that can be damaging to world trade and encourage the growth of protectionism in the world. I am not a free trade freak, but I believe that this country of all nations suffers whenever there is a trade war or a protectionist war.

Mr. Gould: Even if one were to accept the hon. Gemtleman's calculation — which we do not — what would be the point of putting £170 million worth of investment into an industry for whose products there was no market, because the market had been taken by low-cost imports?

Mr. Ashdown: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the textile industry has been successful in going up market and bringing down prices by investing in new machinery. I remind him also that the West German industry, which is ahead of ours, can almost compete on the world market without quotas and restrictions, as can American industry. Why should we not exist in that up-market, lower-cost sector? Deployment of these sums would considerably help successful textile industries.

I return to the point made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) about children's clothing. He said that the price had increased by 164 per cent. and recounted a series of other items—carefully selected and taken from one of the manufacturer's briefings—where prices had increased even more. Surely, we must look at this matter on an apples for apples and a pears for pears basis. Surely it is reasonable to assess the amount by which the price of children's clothing has increased in comparison with clothing prices in general. That paints a different picture, because the price of clothing in general has increased by 127 per cent. and it is the poorest sectors of society who are paying most. That fact has been missed.

The poorest countries which we sought to assist through liberalisation of the MFA have been suffering. Since MFA 1 started, imports from the developed nations have decreased from 30 per cent., to 24 per cent., and 21 of the leading less developed countries have asked for a return to bilateral trade.

I do not wish to detain the House too long but I cannot resist remarking on the fact that the Labour party, which is always trying to convince us with crocodile tears about its commitment to Third world development, is insisting on this occasion on erecting and maintaining these protectionist barriers which so evidently damage the less developed and poorer countries. It is a remarkable fact that even the Government are more liberal with respect to the third world in these matters than the Labour party wishes to be. The only ally that the Labour party has in this area is the hon. Member for Macclesfield whose views on development problems are as well-known as they are unsupportable.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with such an attack, especially when it is so inaccurate. One of the points I raised with the Under-Secretary of State was the failure of the EEC negotiating mandate to attempt to make room for concessions to poorer countries. The hon. Gentleman has failed to understand the point made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South that the MFA is designated not to operate in an entirely protectionist way but to regulate improved access for the poorer countries.

Mr. Ashdown: It has not had that effect. That is totally at odds with the view of the world development movement, which is a well-respected authority in these matters.

We look for a decent plan for textiles and for a decent industry and economic strategy. We need recognition of the effect of exchange rates. As de Zoete and Bevan has said in a recent letter to the *Financial Times*, the effect of the exchange rate is infinitely more important to the textile industry than the continuation of the MFA.

I would not wish the MFA to be brutally or precipitately dismantled. That would be wrong. *[Interruption.]* Let me make it clear, as I did in the last debate on this subject, that I believe that there is a need for a renewed MFA for one more term. But it would be wrong to tighten it, as some hon. Members would like. I believe that any movement should be in the opposite direction. The industry deserves better than just "something on MFA". Everyone knows that there will be a day when the MFA

will no longer exist. It is time we started to plan for that. We should be adjusting to the fact that the MFA is not a permanent institution to protect this nation and one day will have to go. We should put in its place something much firmer and better for the industry. We should be adjusting to that fact, not pretending that it is not there and conveniently hiding behind the delusion.

5.44 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I give credit to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) because he has at least been consistent and we know where he stands. The world of which he speaks is a world of ideals; it is not the world we know and understand. Like my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Industry, I look forward to the day when it will be possible to do without artificial restraints of this kind. But I believe that that day is some way off.

The hon. Member for Yeovil said that the multi-fibre arrangement had allowed the industry to continue without restructuring. That is far from the truth. There can have been no industry in our history that has had to restructure as quickly and as radically as the textile industry in the past few years.

The textile industry has not always been supremely efficient. It has nevertheless rapidly increased productivity, heavily invested in advanced technology and shown adaptability in the face of changing customer demand. There are new styles, fabrics and fashions. The industry differs greatly from 10 years ago. There has been a great shakeout. The industry has been fortunate because there is determined management, among the companies that remain, and a constructive approach has been demonstrated by trade unions in a way that is almost unique in British industry. I pay credit to them.

The hon. Member for Yeovil talked about the need to help underdeveloped countries. I agree with him, but he was wrong about means of doing so. I point out to those who would like to abolish the MFA that it is only because the MFA imposes restraints on the more advanced of the developing countries that the most underdeveloped nations have any opportunity to gain a foothold in world markets. Similarly, those who speak out against any liberalisation must recognise that a refusal to give any ground at all is an attack on the poorest peoples in the world as well as, in some ways, an attack on British consumers.

The MFA is a developing arrangement to allow orderly changes in trade to take place. That is why it must be renegotiated every few years. Some Labour Members talk as though any move towards liberalisation were a betrayal, but I do not believe that that is the view expressed by the industries. They recognise that the MFA is an evolutionary instrument. The idea that it must remain unchanged is fallacious. Nevertheless, we need to retain a strong agreement. The opponents of the MFA ignore the fact that it allows the volume of clothing imports to increase substantially and the fact that retail prices of clothing have risen much less quickly than the average of all retail prices.

During last year's debate and subsequently we have heard voices, including that of the hon. Member for Yeovil, urging that the MFA 4 should be the last MFA. I very much welcome the fact that Ministers have refused to give any such commitment. That stance has been vigorously affirmed today. Changes have been happening so quickly that it would be folly to try to forecast the position in 1990. It would be supreme stupidity to throw away our best bargaining counter. During the next round of GATT multilateral trade negotiations we shall need to retain it. The benefit to be gained from making a commitment at an early stage is small. The disadvantages stare us in the face.

Reference has been made in the debate to the world development movement. It, too, has suggested that the forthcoming multi-fibre arrangement should be the last, but all those who seek to improve the lot of the poorest countries should be aware that they would be the first to be swept aside in a free for all. One of the objectives of the negotiations should be to discriminate in favour of imports from the poorest countries, but to throw away any such arrangements would be extremely damaging to them.

Let no one imagine that the textile industry seeks to be mollycoddled. On the contrary, I am afraid that there are all too many instances of our industry being allowed to become the fall guy. France, Belgium, Holland and Italy got away for years with the extension of massive aid to their textile industries. Throughout that time the European Community failed to act. The Community is now tightening up its competition policy, and one of the first schemes to be vetoed was our own more limited CLOFT scheme. A few years ago the textile and clothing industries employed more than 800,000 people; they now employ about 490,000. However, they still provide jobs for far more people than most people give them credit for. In modernising themselves they have overcome considerable obstacles. They now look to the Government to ensure that there is fair competition—not special privileges—and stability so that they can invest for the future.

Nobody should underestimate the extent of the pressure for protectionism in the United States and the effect that further protectionism would have upon the diversion of imports to Europe, particularly to our very open market. American Congressmen seeking re-election every two years are vulnerable to single interest pressure groups. Although President Reagan has been firm so far in vetoing the Jenkins Bill that was passed by Congress, who can tell what will happen in August when it is brought forward again or, if not then, at a later date? Congress may then obtain the two thirds majority that it requires to overcome the presidential veto.

The tariffs that are operated against our exports to the United States are already a major barrier. Although our manufacturers have improved their quality and designs in order to increase their performance in the American market, nobody can doubt that if currency factors were to operate against us and that if protectionism were to be stepped up at the same time, not only would our export drive be badly blunted but we should also face massive pressure at home, which would result in the loss of many jobs.

We must also remember that the European Community's bilateral trading arrangement with China expires at the end of 1988 and that the growth of exports from China would have an explosive effect as the Chinese sought markets for their products. Genuine two-way trade exists with some states such as Hong Kong and Singapore. United Kingdom imports per head from them are not broadly out of line with imports per head by them of British textiles and clothing.

However, the position is very different for South Korea, Taiwan and Brazil. They hold down our exports annually to the value of just 6p, on average, per head of population. We imported from those countries £4·80 worth of textiles and clothing for each British citizen. For

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countries that must now be considered to be industrialised, this disparity is unacceptable. Other countries are highly protectionist, too — for example, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. But Korea, Taiwan and Brazil in particular are making rapid advances, and their populations include those with middle and upper income levels. They could therefore become significant markets for the high quality goods that are produced by the United Kingdom textile and clothing industries. Even if we could sell products to the value of £1 per citizen per year to Taiwan and South Korea, and perhaps only 50p per citizen per year to Brazil, it would mean a £100 million boost to our textile industry. It would create 4,500 new jobs in the United Kingdom.

When my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade takes part in the discussions about the new MFA, he should have engraved on his heart the fact that Korean tariffs against British goods range from 35 to 40 per cent. and that many imports are banned altogether; that Taiwan's tariffs range from 40 to 100 per cent. and that some bans likewise apply there; and that Brazil applies a tariff of 105 per cent., a tariff that at one stage rose to 205 per cent., although it has been somewhat relaxed. But Brazil bans the import of most of our textile products. All these countries enjoy generous access to our markets under the MFA, with tariffs—if they exist at all—up to a maximum of 15 per cent.

This cannot be allowed to continue. Before we relax our vigilance we need more than just assurances — for instance, from Korea — about future reductions. Countries with open markets deserve to be treated more favourably. If we are sufficiently strict with markets that are closed to us, it will give us scope to be more generous to more open markets.

The wool textile industry, in which I have a particular constituency interest, has said that for its products it is willing to accept greater flexibility. The wool sector is inextricably bound up with knitting and clothing. It is in those downstream sectors that it is vital to retain certain quotas. In the wool sector, quotas need to be retained on wool tops from south America, whose countries enjoy all the benefits of state aid, including differential exchange rates and freight rates and also export subsidies. Also let us not forget that state traders like Romania can dump cheap suits on our market at prices as low as £14 each. There are quotas that the industry is prepared to forgo, but others remain vital to its future prosperity and job creating potential.

Textiles are evolving fast. It is not a sunset industry. I am glad that Ministers have ceased to refer to it as a sunset industry. It is grasping new opportunities and meeting new challenges, using the most modern techniques that high technology can offer. The industry will be encouraged by the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, but it has been disappointed on many occasions and it will wait before it can cheer the outcome of these negotiations.

5.57 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I share the confidence of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) in the new Minister for Trade. I know that he put a great deal of work into the last Bill that dealt with the trade unions. I hope that he will put as much work into the renegotiation of the multi-fibre arrangement. The workers in the textile industry and its management are to be congratulated. They have worked together to overcome massive problems. They have had to lay off workers, who have then joined the dole queue.

The Minister for Trade suggested that there has been a recovery in the textile industry. I accept that, up to a point, but almost at the beginning of the Minister's speech my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) intervened to say that 500 jobs a week had been lost in the industry since the introduction of the MFA. The MFA is now being renegotiated, but the Minister will be up against formidable problems. Reference was made to the battles that we shall have with European Community officials in Brussels.

There is a problem with the negotiating mandate. We are really up against it. The Commission's paper containing the draft negotiating mandate is a detailed document and it contains about 20 separate proposals to liberalise and weaken the existing regime.

I listened closely and wanted to hang on to every word of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). I am pleased that he is not the Minister. I know that he has left the Chamber, but I feel that I must make these remarks. It was not many days ago that he was fighting for the people of Westland because it is in his constituency, but today he made a contribution to the debate as though he could not care less about the textile industry. It is obvious to me that he said that there should be no protectionism. He was trying to protect the workers in his constituency. We are trying to protect the workers within the textile industry and other industries in this country in the hope that those industries will expand and will create more jobs.

I have a little faith in the Minister simply because he has been successful in accruing capital. That is a step in the right direction. If he can manage that, which he has because he has a bob or two, he might be successful in breaking down the Commission. The Commission should be broken down because of the way in which it conducts itself and speaks. It is excessively liberal and it will greatly increase import penetrations—I am talking about the draft mandate which I mentioned earlier. The Commission will also remove or substantially weaken the safeguard mechanisms built into the MFA, and it will create new uncertainties in the regime and it will become legitimate for imports substantially to exceed quotas. We must control dumping as well as insist on quotas. The hon. Member for Yeovil could not care less about that and it clearly suggests to me, and I am sure to other hon. Members, where his opinions and ideas lie.

Mr. John Whitfield (Dewsbury) *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: I am sorry, but I shall be as brief as I can because other hon. Members want to speak.

We must have meaningful negotiations with a view to achieving something which is acceptable. I again part company with the hon. Member for Yeovil. He is talking like the previous Minister, now the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who was talking about a once-and-for-all agreement. We must have the right to renegotiate if it is necessary in the interests of our workers and industries. The door must be kept open and there should be no question of closing it once and for all.

Mr. Whitfield *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: I will not give way because I promised Mr. Speaker that I would be brief in the interests of other hon. Members.

I agree with the Minister that the biggest danger is Europe. The hon. Member for Yeovil suggested that the Labour party would not do what it says it will for underdeveloped countries. If we get into office, we will show the hon. Gentleman what we mean by helping underdeveloped countries.

I come back to the point made by the Minister. When we talk about Europe, we talk about developed countries, and that is the problem. I wish the Minister well in his negotiations and I hope that we will get regular reports from the Dispatch Box about how successful he is being in our interests. It is the Minister's chance to make a name for himself. He did not make a name for himself in his previous Department, but he now has the chance to do so in the interests of the textile industry, particularly hosiery and knitwear.

In my constituency I have seen the suffering, and the massive amount of work put in by the trade unions and management to try to overcome the serious problems. It is a question of the management and unions agreeing. They have committed themselves to investment within the industry. The Government have to back that up by renegotiating in the interests of the industry. I hope that when the Minister goes to the negotiations he will not let the other countries push him around. He should give them some of what they have been dishing out to us over the past few years. I give the Minister just one warning—"Do not go rushing in and cock it up".

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I made an appeal for brief contributions. The speeches have not been very brief. Six hon. Members want to speak, and I understand that the first Front-bench speaker wants to rise at 6.35 pm. May I again make a plea for brief contributions?

6.6 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): In view of your remarks Mr. Speaker, I shall not refer to the preceding speeches, and I shall not refer to some of the Liberal nonsense which the House has heard and not particularly liked.

For the sake of the east midlands and for those with knitwear interests it is essential that the MFA is renewed. It has a fantastic record, and I cannot understand why so many people think that the MFA should be dismantled. Despite having what some people who are opposed to it regard as a restrictive structure, since the establishment of the MFA in 1973 the developing countries have increased their share of world textile trade from 30 to 38 per cent., while the industrialised countries' share of the textile trade has fallen from 59 to 49 per cent., and a similar patten can be seen with all the other fabrics.

In the 12 years since the inception of the MFA, the developing countries have steadily increased their share of world trade. The big advantage is that it has been done in an orderly way with which the developing countries have been able to cope. If, as some would wish, our Government went to Brussels, or wherever the negotiations are to be held, without a mandate to renew a vigorous MFA and it was abandoned, one of the big sufferers would be the developing countries, because the MFA is a form of protection for them. It has been made quite clear by the United States that if the MFA is abandoned, it will introduce unilateral restraint measures.

I shall skim on quickly. China is another world giant which is flexing its muscles. What would that country do if there were a total lack of restraint? There is no doubt that abandonment of the MFA would enable China to expand its export sales enormously at the expense not only of the developed countries but of the lesser developed countries and some of the newly developed countries. In other words, abandonment of the MFA would release the strength of China and its massive manufacturing capacity on to world markets.

Time forbids me to say what people associated with the knitwear industry in my constituency think of the Silberston report, whose conclusions are wrong. This is the first time that the House has had to touch on it since it came out. Basically, its assumptions are based on inadequate evidence, and solely on the cotton industry, which is a unique case in the textile and clothing trade. We are certain that the report's calculations and predictions about employment and job losses are hopelessly out of date and wrong.

The MFA has done much for the British knitwear and textile industry. It has enabled many of our companies to become a little more modern and to get more sophisticated machinery, with great co-operation from the work force. This will enable the British textile industry to compete in the world market by keeping ahead with modern machines. We have had the most fantastic co-operation from the work force and the unions, and all this would be placed in jeopardy if a free for all were to obtain.

The MFA gives guarantees and growing access to textile and clothing imports from developing countries with average growth rates well in excess of the very low volume of growth in demand in the United Kingdom market. Our market had an average growth of under 0·4 per cent. a year between 1978 and 1985. The MFA can help the textile and clothing industries to develop in the poorest countries. The House has been concerned with famine in the world and the needs of the impoverished countries, on which the Government have a good record. In the textile and clothing sectors the MFA can help to protect the emerging nations, which would be swept away if there were unrivalled and unbridled competition.

I have the honour to represent part of the east midlands —a small but not unimportant part. In the knitting sector alone, two thirds of the people employed come from the east midlands. Some 124,000 were employed in 1974, but this has been reduced to 81,000. No Government, and particularly not my Government, can permit that continuing decline.

6.13 pm

Mr. Tom Torney (Bradford, South): Contrary to what the Minister said, I assure him that both the employers and the trade unions in the textile industry are united in their demand for the continued protection of the MFA. I suggest that he asks his researchers to do better with their brief on that point in future.

Wool textiles have suffered serious setbacks in trade over many years. Bradford and its districts, of which I represent part, are evidence of this with derelict mills, open spaces where mills once stood and, in a few cases, mills being used for other purposes. All this has resulted in considerable unemployment among textile workers.

[Mr. Tom Torney]

Despite an excellent relationship between the trade unions and employers in the industry, there has been mass unemployment, but nobody can claim that textile workers are highly paid, for it is a low wage industry. The MFA has undoubtedly made a major contribution to the fight back by the industry to recover some stability and confidence. Employment has stabilised at around 38,000 or 39,000 in the woollen textile industry.

There has been significant investment in the latest technology, productivity has risen, and considerable improvements have been made in colour, design and marketing. In Bradford, as in the whole of west Yorkshire, we can produce the finest textiles and suiting cloths in the world. We can compete in the world markets with the best, but not with countries that produce textiles but pay their workers only slave rates, with few or no fringe benefits.

However, we cannot compete with countries that, by various means, subsidise their textile industries, fiddle their supplies though other countries, and even indulge in false labelling to deceive the purchaser that the garment is British made. This is grossly unfair competition and such actions are losing the jobs of other workers. The MFA did not stop every loophole of unfair competition, but it went a long way along the road.

The Government appeared to be taking a far too relaxed attitude in the run-up to the renewal of the MFA. They do not seem to be fully prepared to argue with the so-called EEC partners who wish to weaken the MFA. Will the Government allow the textile industry to go the way that they have allowed so much of our manufacturing industry to go and to close down, with consequent additions to the continuing job losses in our country? It is criminal to do this after the years of hard work put in by everybody to fight back against recession and achieve some stability in the textile industry. To consolidate our industry and to maintain existing jobs, we must have the MFA renewed, and it must be no weaker.

6.16 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): There are some excellent textile firms in the most unlikely places, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will agree. Later this month, my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Morrison) will open yet another high-tech extension in Barnstaple to the factory complex run by Norman Sussman, a man famous thoughout the industry and greatly respected and appreciated in north Devon. Without some form of MFA, neither this extension nor previous ones would have come about. Neither would extra jobs have been created, nor existing jobs safeguarded.

Some obvious economic lessons can be learnt from the textbook. Free trade in textiles or food means lower prices, which seems excellent until we realise that lower prices caused by vast imports are followed by loss of jobs. That applies as much to shirts as to food. Free trade also means inundation by imports from overseas, leading to the destruction of the factory and the industry. Inevitably one becomes a captive market, with no productive capacity left. We have seen this, for example, in the motor cycle industry.

Is protectionism the answer? It means stable or higher prices, which are bad for the consumer and brings instant reprisal against our own exports. There is as little logic, in this day and age, in saying that we should have all free trade as there is in saying that we should have all protectionism. We have to seek a straightforward and logical compromise.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take into account three points about the MFA that have tended to be lost in today's debate which has been more on principle than practice. By all means update the MFA, but in no circumstance destroy it or make noises that sound as if it will be destroyed 12 months or so hence. Secondly, do not allow any increases in quota when there is no increase in the total market. That way lies lunacy.

Finally, let us have no switching of quotas between EEC countries. This would be impossible to police. The United Kingdom's tight and well-organised distribution network means that we would be inundated with imports and our industry would disappear. It makes no sense and is not the way in which this House should look after the textile industry.

6.19 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): I declare my interest as a Member sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, which represents many workers in the textile and clothing industries.

During the debate, many hon. Members have rightly paid tribute to the industrial, economic and social importance of the textile and clothing industries. It should be noted that the industry's sales are worth £12 billion and exports are worth £3 billion. The importance of the industries for employment has already been recognised. In Britain, 500,000 people are employed in those industries.

It is sometimes overlooked that many people, who are not directly employed by the industries, are dependent on them, such as in transport, engineering, chemicals and the financial services. The future of the industries is important, and we all wish to see them expand and their prosperity continue.

There can be no argument about the major importance of the clothing and textile industries, but we must remove some of the misunderstandings about the multi-fibre arrangement. It is a modest attempt to try to manage and plan trade. The arrangement allows for the growth of textile and clothing imports, although judging from some contributions during the debate that has not been readily understood.

We need a strong and effective multi-fibre arrangement to provide our domestic industries with the confidence to take decisions to plan and expand investment. The remarks, which have already been mentioned, of the chief executive of Vantona Viyella plc demonstrate the importance that many leading industrialists place upon a renewed, strong and effective MFA.

We must recognise the importance of the textile and clothing industries to areas that are characterised by high unemployment. West Yorkshire is a notable example. We have heard that the average loss of jobs during the lifetime of the current MFA has been 500 a week. Increased productivity, new technology and other developments will cause further job losses.

We must sustain employment in high unemployment areas. The textile and clothing industries are extremely important to many communities that are ravaged by high unemployment. A recent report published in Bradford looks to the future of Bradford in the year 2000. It points out that, rather than attracting new industry, we should

invest in existing industry if Bradford is to stand any chance of developing as a major industrial city in the year 2000.

The textile and clothing industries must be a major target for new investment. Government policies should be directed towards encouraging investment in those industries to ensure that employment is expanded rather than reduced and to ensure that those industries are helped in every conceivable way.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) who spoke on behalf of the alliance. He seemed seriously to misunderstand one essential point. He made much in his speech about the fact that the poorest and least developed countries had not gained from the advantages that our markets can offer them. He misunderstands. One reason that those countries have not used up their quotas is that demand in Britain has been low during recent years. Britain has had a major recession with 4 million unemployed, who are not buying as much clothing and textiles as in the past—wherever they are produced.

The hon. Member for Yeovil made a special point about children's clothing. We have a depressed market because of the recession, but there are added problems with children's clothing. There are now fewer children and young people than in years past, but that has not been recognised by the hon. Member for Yeovil.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Madden: No, I wish to make a brief speech.

Many people are dependent on the textile and clothing industries. Women represent 63 per cent. of the work force. If we are to provide the chance for women to seek and keep employment, it is important to maintain employment opportunities in those industries. Many young people and many of those who originate from the ethnic minorities work in those industries.

Recently, the Government gave small amounts of money to help the inner cities. A positive way to help the inner cities is to encourage investment in the textile and clothing industries, which operate in many deprived areas. I urge the Government to recognise their importance to the disadvantaged and depressed areas of the United Kingdom.

West Yorkshire has the lowest pay rate of the nine main urban regions of the United Kingdom. West Yorkshire has almost 500 clothing firms, which are covered by the wages councils agreement. Most of those firms pay rates as low as £65 to £78 a week. In many cases the rates fall to £50 a week. Average full-time earnings in west Yorkshire are £150 a week, but in clothing and textiles average earnings are £100 a week.

Systematic and substantial overtime is being worked in many clothing and textile firms. Instead of allowing substantial and systematic overtime, which is necessary to many workers, because of their low basic earnings, the Government should try to expand employment opportunities.

I wish to discuss the least developed countries. If the Minister has not already read the TUC document published a year ago "A Fair Balance in Textile and Clothing Trade", I urge him to do so. The report makes a clear case. It dispels the Minister's notion of disunity among trade unions in the textile and clothing industries. It sets out clearly their sincere concern for the future of the industry in the poorest and least developed countries. Regardless of what the hon. Member for Yeovil has said, if it were not for the limited help of the MFA the textile industry of underdeveloped countries would be smashed by the super-efficient textile industries of Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea. I urge the Minister to meet trade unions representing textile and clothing workers to hear their case for an effective and strong renewal of the MFA and their suggestions about how to assist the least developed and poorest countries. I hope that he will take advantage of that.

I sensed from the Minister's speech that he is new to the job. He will have an exciting journey of self-education and revelation. He should visit some of the areas that we represent and see the history of dereliction. Those who worked in our industries have paid the price for new technology, unfair competition, overseas subsidies and all the fiddles and the rackets with their jobs. Although all the members of some of my constituents' families used to work in textiles, most of them have been made redundant. They have been out of work for two, three or four years and have no prospect of getting other jobs. That experience is not shared by many hon. Members.

I end by quoting from a letter recently published in the *Financial Times* from Peter Booth, the national secretary of the textile group of the TGWU:

> "If the present EEC draft negotiated mandate is adopted at the next Council of Ministers meeting and becomes part of a renewed MFA, it will jeopardize 100,000 textile and clothing workers jobs in the UK. In view of the 300,000 jobs already lost to the industry since 1979 and the shameful level of unemployment at 3·4m, more care needs to be taken to ensure the future of this valuable manufacturing industry and the 500,000 UK workers still employed within it."

That is the challenge that faces the Minister, and we shall watch him closely. We expect to be kept informed of the progress of the negotiations. I assure the Minister that many people who depend directly and indirectly on the textile and clothing industries will wish him every success, but they will not tolerate a sell-out by the Government. A great deal rides on the negotiations. I hope that the Minister will take full account of everything that has been said in the debate and will ensure that the next MFA is not significantly more liberal than the present one.

6.32 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): During the MFA negotiations, Hong Kong will be pressing its case in the appropriate quarters. I hope that the United Kingdom Government will give Hong Kong the fullest possible support, and that especially in the inner councils of the European Community, where Britain is represented and Hong Kong is not, they will ensure that Hong Kong's interests are fully represented.

On 15 January, the previous Minister for Trade said in answer to a question from me on the arrangement:

> "We certainly take the view that it should give favourable treatment to the poorest developing countries and to developing countries with very low barriers to British exports, which includes Hong Kong."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 1986; Vol. 89, c. 1065.]

I hope that my hon. Friend the new Minister for Trade will confirm that that is his approach. The previous Minister mentioned "very low barriers", but Hong Kong has no barriers on textiles. Not only are there quota barriers, but there is 14 per cent. duty on textiles and clothing imported into the United Kingdom.

Under the MFA, Hong Kong has suffered a reduction in quota from 16 to 11 per cent. My hon. Friend said that

[Mr. Roger Sims]

one subject to be discussed in Brussels is whether the so-called dominant suppliers, of which Hong Kong is the most important, should be treated less favourably than other countries. I must tell him that such a move would be most unfavourably received in Hong Kong at this very sensitive time. I strongly urge him to resist it with the robustness of which we all know he is capable. The words "treated less favourably" imply penalties, and Hong Kong has been penalised enough already.

The theory of the quota reductions was that they would benefit the developing countries. That has not been the case. Indeed, the developed countries have benefited, with the EC countries increasing their share of the United Kingdom market from 38 to 48 per cent. The developing countries have not been helped, and many of them have said that they do not wish the MFA to be renewed.

Hong Kong has no natural resources other than the skill and industry of its people, who manufacture a wide range of high-quality products of good value, of which textiles are among the most important. At present, Hong Kong's position is one of certainty and uncertainty: certainty in the sense that the agreement with China about 1997 and beyond has been finalised; and uncertainty about the political and economic developments that are likely before then.

Hong Kong is an important supplier and an important and completely open market for British goods — at present to an annual value of £949 million. A statement that Hong Kong's case is understood by the Government and will be robustly championed by them in the negotiations would do much to reassure the people of the territory. I hope that my hon. Friend can offer that reassurance.

6.35 pm

Mr. Geoff Lawler (Bradford, North): A welcome feature of the debate has been the many positive references to the textile industry—references that are long overdue. We should recognise its significant achievements. The debate is not about propping up the industry, but about maintaining a fair and stable trading environment that gives the industry confidence for future investment. There is no doubt that confidence is returning to the industry, especially the wool textile industry, which has increased productivity by one third and increased exports during 1985 by about 16 per cent., reaching a record £600 million. It still employs a healthy 14,500 people in Bradford.

There is equally no doubt that the developing countries have a great potential to penetrate United Kingdom markets on such a large scale as to affect British companies adversely. Many of those countries have the heaviest protections and the most effective shields for keeping out imports. As long as trade is one-directional, we must continue to have safeguards. The textile industry used to sell south of the equator, but that entire part of the world, as with others, has been cut off, not because British manufacturers cannot meet prices or deliver goods on time, or because our designs or fashions are out of date, but because of the tariff barriers imposed by those countries.

The wool textile industry and textiles in general can export. During the past few years they have found new markets and developed existing ones with great effectiveness, but no matter how good they are, they cannot sell in countries which have barriers, such as 50 per cent. in South Korea and 105 per cent. in Brazil. That inequality must be recognised in the renegotiation of the MFA. The new agreement must allow for reciprocity, so that we can serve notice on those countries that we will not tolerate their prohibitive barriers and that we wish to encourage free trade.

Britain cannot consider its position in isolation. There are great protectionist pressures across the Atlantic—probably greater than those in Britain—as a result of the dramatic increase in December last year of 41·3 per cent. in textile and clothing imports into the United States. During the past four years imports into America have doubled—imports to a market that has had little or no growth. Congress responded with a Bill that was vetoed by the President, but it is likely to be reintroduced at election time, when it will require only another 6 per cent. of the votes to see it through.

If, as is likely, America takes a tough line in negotiations, the EC must not take a weaker line. If it does, we shall suffer the effects of a significant trade diversion from a United States market that takes in £15 billion, as opposed to our £5 billion worth of imports.

Healthy profits and investments, and technological change, will be factors in making the MFA unnecessary. We do not call for an endless MFA, but we do call for an effective fourth agreement, because that will eventually reduce protectionist pressures and lead to liberalisation. The textile industry is not a sunrise industry, nor is it a sunset industry, but there is a great fear that it could be sundown for many British companies if a liberal MFA is agreed in the face of what is happening elsewhere.

6.40 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The House must send a clear and unequivocal message to Brussels today, and that message is simply, "It is not on." We have heard whispers of what is being considered by the Commission. The proposals that we have heard about are utterly unacceptable. They are particularly unacceptable to this country in the aftermath of the first ever deficit on manufacturing trade.

Against that background, how on earth can we afford to say to Europe, or to the rest of the world, that we can write off, or see severely damaged, an industry which contributes £12,000 million a year to our national income, which provides 10 per cent. of all manufacturing jobs and has 500,000 workers in areas where, if they lose their jobs, they will be destined to become not just unemployed, but long-term unemployed?

Another message which Ministers must take to the Commission is that perceptions about this industry are out of date. The textile industry is not a hang-over from the 19th century, which is how the Commission sees it, and it is not a "no-tech, low-tech" industry. The industry, in an age of new technology, is at the forefront in pioneering new techniques. In fact, the concept of old industry and new industry has no relevance in an era in which the industry is applying the new technologies of robotics and the microchip.

That is demonstrated if we consider the world leaders in the industry. The export leaders do not come from the Third world. West Germany dominates the world in textile exports, and Japan is second. In December, the *Financial Times* carried a small article headed "Star of the Stock

Market". The article was referring to Tokyo and the star of the stock market was the Japanese textile industry. The Japanese have invested to ensure that that industry is at the forefront of new technology. We can do the same, and our industry is trying to do that. Indeed, as he has been quoted as saying, David Alliance has invested £50 million to show that the industry can achieve that, and he is willing to invest more.

We must face reality. If we are to have a high investment industry, we must have an industry that faces certainty. To achieve high investment, the people who are risking their money must be certain of a return, and there must be profitability. If there is no profitability, there will be no resources to invest.

We have heard today from both sides of the House of the crucial importance of the industry to employment. The industry is concentrated in those areas of greatest deprivation where, as I have said, there is no prospect of alternative employment for those who lose their jobs. Superimposed on that is the problem of the inner cities. Unfortunately, in too many of our inner cities ethnic minority women see the industry as the only possibility of earning an income.

I welcome the Minister for Trade to his new position. We have heard today that he is thinking of liberalising the MFA 3, which is now coming to an end. He should bear in mind what other hon. Members have said——

Mr. Alan Clark: I did not say that.

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman did say that, and I wrote it down at the time. I invite the Minister to check the *Official Report* tomorrow, as I certainly will.

As hon. Members have stated, under MFA 3 25,000 jobs a year have been lost. The Minister who is to reply to the debate should tell the House how many jobs would be lost if the Commission's proposals were implemented. How many more textile workers are the Government willing to sacrifice to support Brussels rather than our industry?

I do not trust the Commission when it comes to dealing with the likely MFA mandate. I say that as a pro-European, not as an anti-European and because I had experience as a Minister of State at the Department of Industry under the Labour Administration during the MFA 2 negotiations. I warn the Minister that he will have to take a strong line. I sent my negotiators in the Department of Industry—Department of Trade team back to Brussels because I was unwilling to accept that what they said was the final word. I hope that the Minister will consider doing the same if necessary. If he allows a weak negotiating position on the MFA, he will face disaster on the bilaterals by the time the EEC officials have finished with him.

The Commission's proposed timing is inexplicable and ludicrous in negotiating terms. Why are we being told that we must have our negotiating position finalised by the end of February? The early decision is unnecessary, and also unwise. It is unnecessary because it means that we will have arrived at our negotiating position before any of the other participants have done so. They will be able to see our position before they start revising their postures. It is also unnecessary because the protocol agreement does not have to be finalised until July and, as my hon. Friend, the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, there will be four or five months for further negotiations on the bilaterals.

An early decision is unwise because it will leave us exposed to what the United States eventually decides to do. If, as the president has intimated, the United States takes a rigid, strong and defensive line, as endorsed by recently negotiated bilaterals, we all know where the diverted exports will end up. We all know that we will see an unfair proportion of them here.

It is also unwise because we would reveal our hand at too early a stage. It is unwise because it would not give Spain and Portugal adequate time to represent their positions. I understand, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said, that Portugal has intimated that it would want to reconsider the interim arrangements within the EEC if the Commission's proposals were adopted.

It is not just ludicrous, but absurd, for the Commission to consider carrying on the multilateral and bilateral negotiations concurrently. That makes no sense at all. The bilaterals, as negotiated by the EEC officials, will create a straitjacket which, by July, will mean that there is no room for manoeuvre. The whole position will be predetermined. The Government must tell the Commission that bilaterals are not to be concurrent, but should follow. In those bilaterals, the EEC officials must be limited by what they have been told on the multilateral decision. There must be no drift or undermining of the agreed position, as happened so often in the past.

Even the proposed basis for the negotiations is wrong and untenable. We are speaking of allowing a growth rate that bears no relationship to the market's past growth and probable future growth. Between 1978 and 1985 we saw a growth of 0·4 per cent. a year in the British market, and yet even in group 1, the most sensitive area, the EEC is considering permitting a 1 per cent. growth rate and a growth rate of more than 6 per cent. in the rest of the areas for imports.

The base that will be used to decide the quotas and the growth rates is unacceptable. There should be cuts in the dominant suppliers' quotas to make greater room in the poorest countries. We should relate the negotiating position to actual trade, not to unfulfilled quotas. If we relate them, as the EEC intends, to unfulfilled quotas, with a built-in growth factor, and if the participating countries, with that headroom, were to decide to take up their full quotas with the extra growth, there would be a surge of imports with which we could not cope.

If the mandate were approved, it would leave Britain helpless in the face of any such surge. There would not just be the removal of quota restrictions on many items, but the existing safeguards—inadequate as they are—would be removed. The basket extractor would be relieved and quota switching would be permitted. A combination of those four factors would have a disruptive impact on the British market. They would maximise uncertainty and destroy investment in the industry's future.

I ask the Government to tell the EEC that the proposals that we have heard from Brussels must be seen as a non-starter. The House regards the mandate suggested by Brussels as weak, damaging and completely unacceptable.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): In past trade and industry policy debates, it has been important to put some information on the record quickly to identify those matters on which there is unity in the House.

[Mr. John Butcher]

Hon. Members will have heard me say previously that one statistic underpins all our considerations of trade and economic policy. It is estimated that 80 per cent. of what this country manufactures is internationally tradeable, whereas only 18 per cent. of service sector activity is internationally tradeable. That demonstrates that the nation has no option other than to retain and enhance the United Kingdom's manufacturing base. To that extent, the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) showed some bonding. They were an echo of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade. I hope that they will be encouraged to hear that confirmed.

I have no doubt about the importance that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Butler) attaches to the industry as a key wealth creator in the east midlands. I share the view of the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) that, where there is room to manouevre within the MFA, it should be used on the basis that we identify the poorest countries, by the United Nations definition, and those of the newly industrialised countries which are the most liberal free traders, including Hong Kong, which, in my view, should be rewarded for its free trade policy because it is the nearest that we can see to a completely open market in every sector, and those newly industrialised countries which may be lingering in their affection for protectionist measures in their mature industrial sectors. The MFA should send its own signal of encouragement of liberalisation to those newly industrialised countries.

I share the pride of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler) and of the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) in the great strides that have been made by the texile industry. There was an article in *The Sunday Times* last week in which Ian McArthur, the director of the British Textiles Confederation, was quoted as having made some pertinent observations. He pointed out:

> "Exports were up by 13 per cent. in value last year, to reach a record £3,136 million. 'It has been a remarkably good year,' says Ian McArthur . . . Overall, early industry estimates suggest a 4 per cent. rise in textile and 1 per cent. increase in clothing production in 1984. Productivity is certainly up again, says McArthur, although it is too early to give a precise figure. While there is still a £2·3 billion trade deficit in clothing and textiles, there are signs that its rate of increase is slowing. McArthur describes his mood as one of 'sober optimism'."

That was reflected in a number of speeches made this afternoon from both sides of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) correctly pointed out — this was echoed in other speeches—that we are not talking now, and I hope we never were talking, of a sunset industry. We are talking of a mature industry. By strapping on new technology and introducing new production techniques, the industry is becoming — if I may coin an alternative phrase — a sunshine industry. It is an industry that is living on its wits, adding value, moving up market and becoming involved in new designs.

I shall put in a plug for an immensely underrated policy which could be of benefit to the textile industry. I am looking at my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) when I preface my remarks by saying that it is a scheme which works with the grain of market forces. We can supply to the smaller and medium-sized textile and clothing companies the best designers in the world at a discount, because we will pick up 75 per cent. of the costs of putting in those best designers for 15 man-days work. That will provide products which are relevant to today's market demands, which is surely one of the best ways to help industry fight back in international markets.

Mr. Whitfield: My hon. Friend referred to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). Does my hon. Friend agree that the extraordinary statement that the hon. Gentleman made about the MFA somehow holding back the restructuring of the textile industry, which has largely taken place, is a sign of the Liberal party's lack of understanding of the textile industry? That is further demonstrated by the absence from the debate of the leader of the Liberal party who, by his absence, is presumably showing that he is prepared to abandon the Scottish textile industry to the sacred cow of free trade.

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend has made an interesting point. Bearing in mind the Liberal party's fixation with open government, the hon. Member for Yeovil is duty bound to send copies of his speech to those many constituencies in Lancashire, Yorkshire, the east midlands and Scotland which may wish to be comprehensively informed of what is apparently official Liberal party policy.

Mr. Ashdown: I mentioned the Scottish wool industry. My right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal party is not here but no more is the leader of the Conservative party. The policy I explained is that of the Liberal party. It is the policy of the alliance as expressed almost word for word in my speech on 8 May last year. That speech has been circulated with great effect to those of my hon. Friends who represent textile constituencies such as Leeds, West and Colne Valley. It is a speech of which I and they are proud because it sets out a policy at variance with that of the old alliance between the Labour party and the Conservative party.

Mr. Butcher: I give an undertaking to all hon. Members who have asked questions that we shall write to them giving as clear an answer as we can at this stage of the negotiations.

On the last occasion that I attended a meeting in Brussels on this matter, the Dutch President found that there was such a lack of unanimity that he adjourned the meeting for a fortnight. It is not easy to write to hon. Members and say "this or that is the position" because at the moment there are nine or 10 different positions.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: What is ours?

Mr. Butcher: The British are not on the flank of the most liberal or most protectionist stances of the various nations.

I should make clear our position on subsidies in other parts of Europe and of the world, particularly because the major growth in British imports has been from the European Community; it has not been from the MFA countries.

It is rightly argued that subsidies distort competition within the Common Market, and if such distortions are allowed the British Government should subsidise industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) reminded us that our own proposal for a sectoral aid scheme, CLOFT, was disallowed by the Commission. Our

strongly held view was that this meant that no member state should operate aid schemes for this sector, and we pressed the Commission hard on this. I am pleased to say that by the middle of last year the remaining sectoral aid schemes in other member states had been terminated.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will no doubt bask in the unanimous warmth which descended on him during this debate. I share the concern of the House that my hon. Friend should, bearing in mind the comments made by hon. Members this evening, take his remit with full vigour into the crucial discussions on an important industry.

Fraud Trials (Roskill Report)

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State for the Home Department, may I say that in this debate, as in the last, about a dozen right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part. At the beginning of the previous debate some of the speeches were unduly long which meant that some hon. Members who were called later had to compress their speeches into two or three minutes. I hope that in this debate there will be a fairer distribution of time.

7.1 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): In the month since the publication of the Roskill report there has been much interest in the media concerning its recommendations, and this debate gives the Government an opportunity to hear the views of Parliament. I am glad it has been possible to arrange early debates, both here and in the other place, because it fits exactly the structure of our response to this report, which is to consider, consult and conclude with care and speed. I do not intend to make a long speech this evening because this is an opportunity for the Government to listen rather than to pronounce. The Government will take full account of the views of this House before we reach a firm decision on a report which is important.

A will to listen does not mean a will to delay. We intend, in the next Session of Parliament, to introduce a criminal justice Bill which will seek improvements in many aspect of the criminal justice system and the powers of the courts. The Bill will be wide and substantial and the proposals following the Roskill report will be a crucial part of the Bill. A White Paper will be published shortly which will set out the proposed measures in greater detail.

We intend to create and seize every opportunity for stern action against fraud. We think this is crucial for the City and for the country so that private enterprise can flourish in a clean environment. It is crucial for public confidence, and our competitive position in international markets that the probity of our financial institutions, especially in the City, should be beyond doubt. Those who save and invest, whether grand or small, should be well protected by our law from dishonest practices, however complicated the transaction. We are determined that the pursuit and the bringing to justice of fraudsters should be carried out with commitment and skill. If our present instruments for cutting our fraud are blunt we must manufacture a new carefully directed scalpel.

The report is radical. Some of its recommendations have been criticised but no one has criticised the skill and thoroughness with which the Committee completed its task. On behalf of the Government and the House, I would like to thank the Committee for its work and record our immense admiration and sincere thanks to Lord Roskill and his colleagues for the major contribution which the report makes to the fight against fraud.

When one studies the subject in a wider prospective it is fair to say that the strategy adopted in 1983 is beginning to show results. The fraud investigation group has been established on a permanent basis for more than a year. This has been a successful attempt to reduce the fragmentation in the investigation and prosecution of complex fraud cases. We have to go further down that path. The report vindicates the 1983 decision to appoint a committee to look at the way in which fraudsters are caught and brought

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

to justice. The Financial Services Bill, now before the House, contains measures which should substantially improve the effectiveness of self regulation within the financial markets. Early detection of irregularities can often prevent serious fraud and as with all crime, prevention is our first aim. If prevention fails then the machinery for dealing with fraud must be effective.

The legal profession may have doubts about altering some time-honoured ways. I have already learnt the deep suspicion with which many hon. Members who are members of the legal profession regard the suggestions for change. Those whose professions put them in the centre of financial transactions are perhaps less hesitant. Certainly Lord Roskill's committee was not hesitant.

The committee's message to the House and to the Government is that one cannot send a policeman on a bicycle to catch a runaway car. We have to equip those who chase fraud with the same speed already possessed by the fraudster. I do not doubt that there are valuable conclusions to be drawn from an examination of the present investigation and prosecution arrangements. If fraud is not effectively uncovered and detected then no procedural reforms of the law and later conduct of criminal proceedings, will deter the big fraud operators. At present responsibility for investigation and prosecution is shared by the police, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Department of Trade and Industry and other agencies. From April the prosecution functions of the police will move to the Crown prosecution services in certain areas and from October throughout England and Wales. The co-operation between these major agencies has greatly improved in recent years and permanent Fraud Investigation Group arrangements are now in place.

FIG brings together the police and other investigators — accountants, interested Government Departments, counsel and members of the DPP's staff. One of the Director's lawyers exercises day-to-day supervision — acting almost as one of the "case controllers" which the report recommends. The aim of FIG is to concentrate on major frauds, although the categories are not closed, and to complete investigations quickly and to bring to an end inquiries which turn out to be fruitless. That is the present position.

Lord Roskill suggests that other arrangements are still too fragmented and he recommends an urgent inquiry into the possibility of a new unified organisation responsible for all the functions of detection, investigation and prosecution of serious fraud cases. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is studying this most closely with other Ministers. He is also considering much of what the report has to say about the deployment of resources to combat fraud—that is probably the most artistic job for a Chief Secretary to undertake.

The Department of Trade and Industry and the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions have a provision for extra staff—the DTI for nearly 200 posts, which is a big increase, and the Director of Public Prosecutions for nine extra lawyers who will be assigned, full time, to fraud cases. I know my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's inquiry will be done briskly. I understand that he hopes to reach conclusions by early summer. If, as may well be, those conclusions require something extra in the criminal justice Bill, we shall see to that.

The inquiry will, of course, have a bearing on the role of the police. Lord Roskill has some practical recommendations of immediate relevance to the police. The House is aware that I am carrying out an urgent review to assess the specific need for further increases in the resources in the establishment of the Metropolitan police. The fraud squad is part of that review, and I hope to complete it very shortly now.

The accounting advice which Lord Roskill thinks the police need is available through the fraud investigation group, and steps are being taken to recruit three additional accountants. On the initiative, which is welcome, of the accounting profession, a panel of experienced accountants in private practice has been set up in London to help the police and the director on a case-to-case basis as necessary.

The committee recommends also a career structure for officers in the fraud squad. Being a practical committee, it recognises the difficulties in implementing the recommendation within a generalised service such as the police. The joint Metropolitan and City fraud squad is realistically the only squad of sufficient size — its strength is about 190 officers — to offer a practical opportunity to introduce a career structure. Both commissioners have now agreed to my request that they should examine the feasibility of a career structure for officers in the joint squad. Outside London, the Association of Chief Police Officers will consider the scope for second or subsequent periods of service in the fraud squad to build up the experience which officers accumulate. The association will report back to me.

Lord Roskill recommends better training for the police in fraud investigation and the Association of Chief Police Officers has agreed to review the training provision for fraud squad officers.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): My right hon. Friend will be aware that in a complicated City fraud as many as 25,000 man hours of detective time will be expended. If some of the best detectives are brought into the fraud squad, as I believe they must be, that will have the consequence of removing experienced officers from other areas of detective work.

Mr. Hurd: That is right. That is one of the matters that will be in the two commissioners' minds as they undertake the exercise of considering a career structure.

I turn to the substantive law on which the committee makes recommendations, especially the use of the common law charge of conspiracy to defraud, where there is clearly something amiss. With the agreement of the Chairman of the Criminal Law Revision Committee, Lord Justice Lawton, I have asked the committee to produce a report with the following terms of reference:

> "To review the restrictions on the use of a charge of conspiracy to defraud in the light of the decision in Ayres [1984] AC 447 and subsequent cases and to consider whether these restrictions could be removed without causing injustice to defendants."

I have asked for urgent advice. In the relative excitement generated by proposals to reform the enforcement of the law, we must not neglect the need to ensure that the law itself is sensible and enforceable.

I shall not say much this evening on the committee's proposal for a fraud commission. It would be a body within the existing machinery of Government with an independent chairman and it would monitor the pursuit of

fraud, inquire into major breakdowns, look into delays and publish an annual report. At this rather early stage I have much sympathy with the idea of a watchdog body of that sort but I shall be interested in any ideas that right hon. and hon. Members have about the proposal. Before reaching a conclusion, we shall set up a model of how such a commission would operate and then come to our conclusions upon it.

Our approach to the recommendations that touch on the jury system is still open and I shall listen with close attention to the views of the House. I have noted the views which were expressed in an excellent debate in another place. When we publish our White Paper on the Criminal Justice Bill, there will be a wider forum for consultation.

I shall put one or two considerations before the House that might focus the debate. The main recommendation is that a judge and two assessors should replace a jury in especially complex fraud trials. Naturally many questions arise. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) began to raise these questions on 14 January and expressed the belief that we cannot define complexity. I accept that that is a major issue. I do not think that the guidelines in the report could be translated easily into statute, but there might be no need for a rigid approach of that sort. One criterion which could have an honourable place if the idea of a tribunal took root is as follows

"the complexity lies in the fact that the markets or areas of business operate according to concepts which bear no obvious similarity to anything in the general experience of most members of the public".

What are the arguments for placing such cases beyond the jury system?

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Home Secretary agree that many complex crimes are quite beyond the comprehension and experience of the general public apart from fraud?

Mr. Hurd: Indeed. I understand that argument. I wish to make it clear that there is no feeling in the Government's mind that we should go beyond the Roskill report. I think that Lord Roskill advanced an argument for ring fencing in this area, but I would not want the element of truth in what the right hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) has said to lead us into considering doing away with jury trials for other types of offence, even though they might also be complex. It is the comprehension of the issues that is basic to the Roskill recommendation.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I shall make a little progress and then I shall be happy to allow the right hon. and learned Gentleman to intervene.

In a complex transaction, the final question may be whether the accused was a party to an illegal arrangement, but perhaps that cannot be decided fairly until the nature of the transaction is fully established and analysed. I think that juries can have serious difficulties in understanding the evidence in complex fraud cases, and understanding the relevant evidence is important to the doing of justice both to the innocent and the guilty.

The argument does not seem to hinge on the precise rate of acquittal in fraud trials. Instead, it is directed to whether the complexities of the proceedings may be leading to arbitrary rather than just verdicts. The committee received anecdotal evidence to the effect that the difficulties of presenting the facts in complex cases may lead to decisions to proceed with lesser charges than might be justifiable in some cases. I think that the House would regard that as unacceptable.

Finally, I must have regard to the interests of all involved in the criminal justice system, not least the accused, in adopting mechanisms which reduce congestion and delay and dispose of cases with reasonable speed.

All these considerations are in favour of the committee's conclusion on juries, but there are arguments against it, some of which appear in the powerful minority report of Mr. Merricks. No one doubts that major fraudsters deserve substantial periods of imprisonment, but in our system of open justice is it right that those who risk substantial terms of imprisonment should forfeit the right to be tried by a jury, not because their crime was more serious but because it was more intricate than the next man's? Would a tribunal remove some of the disciplines from counsel to present the case in a comprehensible manner? Might individuals lose their liberty for reasons which few of us could understand? If the real issue is dishonesty, are not ordinary people as good or better judges of the facts than experts in high finance? If the other reforms will simplify matters, is there a case for trying them out first?

The House might wish to pause to reflect on a point which I have not heard put before. If a tribunal were judged to be the fitting answer, as it might be, is it right that majority verdicts should prevail so that the judge might differ from the eventual verdict, having been outvoted by the two assessors?

Mr. John Morris: Will the Home Secretary address himself to the issue which was raised by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)? What is the argument for ring fencing fraud cases, which might include experiences outside the normal for a jury, as opposed to other complex cases which might also involve experiences outside the normal for a jury?

Mr. Hurd: I think that Lord Roskill would argue that there are a substantial number of complex fraud cases and sufficient for special provision to be reasonably argued. I believe that he would argue also that there would not be a sufficient number to justify special provision on other indictments, although occasionally such cases may occur. Nonetheless, they would not be of sufficient number to make necessary the introduction of special arrangements.

There are obviously strong and different views about this which cut across party lines. It seems to me that the legal profession is divided on the recommendation, and the financial professions are overwhelmingly in favour. I expect that this is the last occasion I shall be able or, indeed, shall want to tread a path down the middle.

I should like to end the analysis on this point. It would be wrong and unjust to the committee if we saw this as an attack by it on every person's right to a fair trial in our courts. The committee has made a careful and sensitive attempt to tackle the fundamental question of how to secure a sound verdict. I think that a sound verdict must be our objective. It is as much in the interest of the innocent defendant as it is in the interest of society to bring fraudsters to book. I hope therefore that we will have, as I am sure we shall, a reasonable and balanced debate on this point.

Dealing still with juries, the committee put forward views on the defence right of peremptory challenge and the

[Mr. Hurd]

prosecution right of standby. The distinction between this and the last point about complex fraud tribunals is that with the tribunal case, for the reasons which we have been discussing, discussion is confined to the relatively few cases of major fraud. When one is discussing what Lord Roskill had to say about peremptory challenge, it must be right to look at that more widely.

There has been a lot of discussion, quite independent of fraud, on the merits of change both here and elsewhere. I do not need this evening to go over that discussion. I am quite sure that it cannot sensibly be dealt with for fraud cases alone. In the criminal justice White Paper, we will set out options for change. We shall not seek to abolish ancient rights lightly, but nor shall we hesitate to act if the preservation of the integrity of the jury system is in question.

These two jury matters have aroused high feelings, and that is quite right, but in my view they do not lie at the heart of the report. At the heart of the report are the radical proposals to reform the rules of evidence, including the easing of the gathering of evidence from abroad and the easing of the rules about documentary evidence. We have also here major procedural suggestions to formalise hearings preparatory to Crown court trial, and an associated obligation on the part of the defence to outline the nature of its case.

We find these recommendations immensely constructive and timely. We believe that their potential effect on most cases arising from fraud should not be lost sight of in hot argument over the mode of trial for a minority of particularly complex cases. Few people now believe in my experience that our rules of evidence have kept pace with the 20th century, and the reforms begun in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to allow more documents to speak for themselves found favour with the Roskill committee. Let us now see whether we can go further, as he suggested. Let us also hope that some formalisation of the pre-trial reviews already operating in many Crown courts can clarify the issues to be put at the trial, and that a spirit of co-operation can prevail so that both parties are saved the laborious ritual of arguing matters of no consequence before patient jurors. Let us look particularly hard at the scope for participation in mutual assistance treaties with other countries to facilitate the tracing and conviction of those who perpetrate international fraud.

I have skimmed through these important proposals quite quickly, but I should like to make it clear that we welcome this batch of proposals warmly. We shall take account of views expressed today and of those which may yet be offered by the judiciary, practitioners and others with relevant experience. But we start from a position of willingness to legislate on the basis of these highly significant proposals at the earliest opportunity.

That is the spirit in which we approach the report. I hope that I have clarified some of the central themes. I hope that I have re-emphasised our stern approach to this subject and our willingness to think and act radically about it. The touchstones of our response are justice, efficiency and effectiveness in bringing to account the perpetrators of fraud. We shall carry through all the proposals in the report which pass those tests.

7.24 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The debate comes at at time when public concern about fraud is greater than it has ever been. A batch of unwholesome City scandals has justifiably aroused that concern. But, even without Johnson Matthey, without Lloyd's and without the unsavoury aromas surrounding Westland share dealings, the extent of fraud and its increasing dimensions would certainly justify the disquiet among all sections of the population and in all parts of the country, especially among the small savers, who can least bear the irrecoverable loss and even ruin that fraud inflicts.

Mr. Doiran Williams, the Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions, in a rare public announcement, has voiced the feelings of millions in describing fraud as

"a significant destructive factor in our national life."

In the outstanding report which we are debating this evening, Lord Roskill and his colleagues declare starkly: "in the United Kingdom, fraud is a growth industry". The report goes on to warn:

"We hope that the gravity of this situation will not be underestimated. Fraud is posing a threat to London as a financial centre and to the considerable volume of invisible exports which represents a major factor in the economy of the country."

The sums involved are enormous. A few days ago it was reported in the press that a Home Office survey soon to be published estimates that the loss to the United Kingdom financial community from fraud runs annually at £750 million. Another study calculates that British companies are now being defrauded of £3 billion or more a year. A survey conducted by the accountants Ernst and Whinney has discovered that the average loss per company from fraud amounts to £6,156 a year, which again comes to around £3 billion nationally.

Let us be clear that these are not abstract losses which can easily be borne with a shrug. They are huge sums of money which could have been directed to constructive investment and to the creation of jobs. The extent of this plague of fraud is very wide. Fifty-six per cent. of companies feel that they have experienced fraud in the past, are experiencing it now or may be vulnerable to fraud in the future. Sixteen per cent. suspect that their companies may be a victim of fraud now, and only 1 per cent. of companies surveyed believe that fraud has decreased in the past five years. No fewer than 54 per cent. feel that it has increased. The latest crime statistics show that in the 12 months to September 1985 the increase in the crimes of fraud and forgery was 9·8 per cent. Among all categories of crime, this increase was second only to the 9·9 per cent. in robbery, and there were six times as many frauds as robberies. Those were only the crimes which were notified. Many more frauds are never brought to the attention of the authorities.

Even if all frauds were reported, the authorities are simply not equipped to deal adequately with them. For one thing, the pursuit of fraud is fragmented among far too many organisations whose co-ordination, where it exists at all, is often makeshift.

Between 1978 and 1985 the joint strength of the Metropolitan and City of London fraud squads itself was steadily rising. The Roskill report informs us that in 1983 the Metropolitan and City police company fraud department had its strength deliberately reduced by 10 per cent. because more officers were needed to combat street crimes and burglaries, a point to which the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) drew attention.

Over the country as a whole, as the Roskill report points out, the strength of the fraud squads represents approximately 0·5 per cent.—one two-hundredth—of total police manpower.

For England and Wales, the fraud squad totals fewer than 600. We should compare that with nearly 300 in Hong Kong, which has only one twelfth of our population and therefore proportionately six times as many police pursuing fraud. What is more, the London fraud squad personnel are constantly changing, and it is said that it is common for an officer to be promoted in the middle of a complicated case to traffic or diplomatic protection.

It is no wonder that Mr. Doiran Williams, the Assistant Director of Public Prosecutions whom I have already quoted and who controls the fraud investigation group, recently complained that all who work in the fraud divisions struggle with what he called a "quite monstrous case load". From start to finish, the process of pursuing fraud is bedevilled by a shortage of resources. To me, one of the most shocking revelations is to be found in paragraph 6.34 of the report, which says:

"It is important, in our view, for the judge who is studying a voluminous set of papers in a fraud case out of court to be able to dictate the crucial points in the case so that they can be set out in typewritten form for his later benefit. We understand that the secretarial facilities (typists, audio equipment) available to judges at the Central Criminal Court and elsewhere are seriously inadequate and make little or no allowance for this kind of work to be done. This is a matter of concern."

A matter of concern! I admire Lord Roskill's measured language. It is nothing short of a scandal. It is lamentable that a major report such as this has to be reduced to such de minimis recommendations as the recommendation that judges should be given adequate secretarial facilities. That is only one out of 112 recommendations in this definitive document.

It is a tribute to the thorough and thoughtful work of Lord Roskill and his colleagues that no more than a handful of the recommendations are controversial. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) will, with his special expertise, discuss many of these matters if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those which give rise to some concern and which I feel should be mentioned now include recommendation 58, which says:

"The law should be altered so that the defence are required to outline in writing the nature of their case at the preparatory hearing stage."

This suggestion is made the more worrying by recommendation 59(i), which says:

"The prosecution and the judge should be entitled to comment at the trial, and the jury should be entitled to take account of and draw any appropriate inference from the defendant's failure to disclose a particular line of defence on which he relies at the trial."

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be highly prejudicial and completely contrary to the whole of our judicial system if, in a case in which the defence did not discover its line of defence until after the preparatory hearing, adverse comments could be made at the trial?

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend has a legal experience that is denied to me. I accept and am impressed by what he says. My view, as a non-lawyer, when I read the report was that this provision was potentially dangerously prejudicial and I hope that it will be examined with great care before the Government contemplate proceeding with it.

I am also worried by recommendation 78, which is that the defendant's right of peremptory challenge of the jury would be abolished together with the prosecution's right to stand by for the Crown. That needs the most gingerly consideration.

The recommendation that has aroused the greatest controversy is 82, to which the Home Secretary referred, and which states:

"For complex fraud cases falling within certain Guidelines, trial by a judge and two lay members should replace trial by judge and jury."

I have already said, and I shall plainly say again now, that this recommendation is not acceptable to the Opposition. We want fraudsters to be convicted and we want them to be punished. We would like the worst to be punished in an exemplary way, but we believe that they should be fairly punished after being fairly tried and clearly found guilty.

One of the things that worries us most is the concept which is introduced by the majority procedure on the proposed tribunal of reasoned acquittal. The concept of reasoned acquittal is a very dangerous innovation, and I very much hope that it will not be proceeded with. Our objections are best summed up in the note of dissent by Mr. Walter Merricks, which are published at the end of the report. He refers to the constitutional argument advanced by Lord Devlin, among others, that the right to jury trial has become so much of an institution that it has become more or less a convention of the constitution that citizens should not be liable to more than a limited term of imprisonment otherwise than on a jury verdict. He said:

"The burden is on those who wish to alter the system of jury trial, not simply because that is the present system, but because the right of the citizen not to be liable to incarceration for a lengthy period (the maximum sentence for conspiracy to defraud is life imprisonment) other than on a jury verdict has become a civic right which should only be dislodged for good cause."

The Home Secretary has said that the problem of definition of complex cases is difficult. The report draws attention to the fact that, last year, in Hong Kong, these difficulties were revealed and had to be discussed when it was there proposed to try complex commercial crimes without a jury.

Moreover, as Mr. Merricks says, there is little or no evidence to suggest that complexity is a deterrent to prosecution. Figures for 1983 provided by the Director of Public Prosecutions show that, out of 71 cases in which it was decided not to prosecute, only one failure to prosecute was due to complexity. It seems that, in that case, cost was just as important. There is a danger that, with no incentive to simplify, trial before only a judge and expert lay members would involve more complexities, not fewer, and that that would work to the disadvantage of the accused as well as to the bewilderment of the public.

Even more worrying is the possibility of the removal of the right to a jury trial being extended from fraud cases to others. The Roskill report states frankly:

"We realise that if our recommendations are adopted in fraud cases it would be logical for some of them to apply in all criminal cases . . . we have been careful to ensure that we were not proposing changes in law and procedure which we would not be prepared to see applied to other types of criminal case."

In Monday's debate in the other place, for the Home Office, Lord Glenarthur rather assuringly said:

"I should make it clear that we do not consider this recommendation"—

to dispense with a jury in complex fraud cases—

[Mr. Kaufman]

"to have any application wider than the complex fraud cases which the committee had in mind."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 February 1986; Vol. 471, c. 72.]

That was not the impression given by the Home Secretary in his statement last month when he said:

"Some of the recommendations may well be applicable in other sectors of the criminal law besides fraud."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1986; Vol. 89, c. 928.]

Mr. Hurd *rose*——

Mr. Kaufman: I may save the right hon. Gentleman making an intervention, but if he wishes to make it I shall give way. Tonight, he appeared to have shifted from that stance towards that given by Lord Glenarthur. If so, it is welcome and the right hon. Gentleman need not rise from his relaxed position to reiterate it. Whatever assurances we receive, I believe we should heed the important warning in the joint statement issued by the Criminal Bar Association and the Law Society Criminal Law Committee. The warning they give is of great importance:

"History shows that constitutional changes based upon particular problems are seldom correct and often regretted."

Mr. Hurd: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is aware that the report itself makes it clear that, although some of its other recommendations might be applied to sectors outside fraud, that one was argued simply on the basis of complexe fraud. That has always been my position.

Mr. Kaufman: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has said that. I had the privilege—I shall not go so far as to say the pleasure, although I do not mean that as a criticism of the literary style—of reading the report from beginning to end. Of course I saw that. I also saw the two quotations which I felt it right to make. The committee did not make any caveat or exclusion in paragraph 1.5 when it said:

"if our recommendations are adopted in fraud cases it would be logical for some of them to apply in all criminal cases . . . we have been careful to ensure that we were not proposing changes in law and procedure which we would not be prepared to see applied to other types of criminal case."

It is important to get it clear because we are opposed to the Government proceeding along that path. We do not believe that it is a proper and acceptable change. If they do so, it is very important indeed for it to be made clear that it is a unique change even though my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon has already intimated in an intervention that it would be illogical.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Whether or not the recommendation about jury trials is confined to complex fraud cases, no doubt the right hon. Gentleman will be concerned with the final sentence in paragraph 8.22:

"Society appears to have an attachment to jury trial which is emotional or sentimental rather than logical."

Mr. Kaufman: I accept that completely. There is logic to a jury trial, but in a democracy based upon consent, emotion and sentiment have an important place. I warn the Conservative party that far too often it makes the mistake of pursuing the path of tidy logic against possibly fuzzy public sentiment. Fuzzy public sentiment is important in a consenting democracy.

Mr. Hickmet: The right hon. Gentleman has made precisely the point which I was endeavouring to put to him. The statement in that paragraph is extremely dangerous. I agree with the manner in which the right hon. Gentleman has analysed it and despatched it. It is a most dangerous statement with which I hope the Home Secretary does not agree.

Mr. Kaufman: Then we are pals together and that is all right.

I sum up my argument at this stage by advising the Government to steer clear of that proposal. If they do, I believe that they will have the support of most hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Since he is as concerned as everyone else that the system should not be unfair, has the right hon. Gentleman considered the possibility that some accused people in very complex fraud trials involving, for example, City institutions may be worried that juries may not be able to understand the matter and may think that a special tribunal could understand it? In very complicated trials, might there not be an argument, for the protection of the innocent individual, that he should be able to choose, if he wished, a specialist tribunal in which he had more confidence than a jury? Has the right hon. Gentleman considered that and has he ruled out all possibilities of having a special tribunal even in such circumstances?

Mr. Kaufman: If I were to go to trial for any offence, I am sure that I would cast around and try to decide the best way to be acquitted. But we do not base jury trial on subjective approaches in individual cases. I wonder whether, before his trial started, Mr. Ponting believed that he would be tried fairly by a jury. I wonder too if he believed that when it was decided, rightly in my view, by the Government to make available the extremely complex document, the "crown jewels", for the jury to consider. The jury considered it and came to a conclusion with which I agree. Hon. Members may make an ex parte judgment, but we are considering the general question of the rightness of jury trials in cases where people are liable to long terms of imprisonment. On that I do not wish to depart from the views that I have put to the House. The proportion of my speech on those matters has been lengthened by the interventions, but I do not regret that.

Dozens—scores indeed—of the Roskill recommendations can usefully be implemented by the Government with the support of the Labour party and no doubt with the support of Conservative Members. For example, it is plainly absurd that the pursuit of fraud should be split among 47 organisations, co-ordinated imperfectly where it is co-ordinated at all.

I welcome especially the recommendations to examine the creation of a new unified organisation responsible for all the functions of detection, investigation and prosecution of serious fraud and, meanwhile at any rate, the establishment of a fraud commission. The recommended appointment of a case controller for each serious fraud case makes obvious sense, as does the provision of more expert accounting staff for the Director of Public Prosecutions and police fraud squads.

We also support nomination of a trial judge at an early stage after transfer or committal to a Crown court and the provision of adequate time for the judge to familiarise himself with the case before the preparatory hearing. Again, speaking as a layman and referring back to the

passage about secretarial facilities for judges, I am astounded that such facilities are not already available. It shows the makeshift way in which we approach justice.

Above all, recommendation 10 goes to the heart of the whole problem. Without the Government's commitment to that recommendation they might as well not have asked Lord Roskill to do this essential and painstaking job. The recommendation states:

"The resources devoted to the pursuit of fraud must be expanded as a matter of priority."

That sounds elementary, but resources will be provided only if the determination exists to provide them. It must be said that far too often the determination to pursue fraud has not been evident. *The Economist* has drawn attention to what it calls the "lack of determination". It stated that, in 1983, 323 reports of alleged company fraud were reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions but only 47 were prosecuted.

There are other failures, too. The Roskill report deplores what it calls:

"the reluctance of individual police fraud squads to seek assistance from other fraud squads because the requesting force would be required to pay for the help given."

In Manchester we are complaining because we have had to pay £400,000 out of our rates to finance security round a trial which we did not ask to be held in Manchester. That financially prudent consideration—the reluctance of a requesting force to pay for help given—was not evident during the miners' strike when police forces spent £200 million, if not more, on exactly that kind of mutual assistance.

Again, *The Times*—pre-Wapping—quoted the Roskill report's estimate that the cost of a complex fraud trial is £500,000, stated that the Director of Public Prosecutions or the tax authorities were reluctant to press cases which cost so much unless they can safely predict conviction on serious charges. No such financial meticulousness has governed other decisions to prosecute. Only recently and at great expense there have been the trials of miners from Orgreave and Nottingham. The Orgreave trials cost taxpayers £500,000, and those in Nottingham cost a cool £1,500,000. Yet they ended, not in failure, but in a complete fiasco. The position may be more satisfactory if the Government pursue guilty fraudsters with a fraction of the zeal with which they have pursued miners who have been shown to be innocent.

Although fraud is a disgraceful crime which bleeds individuals, small savers, companies and the economy of vast sums, it is still more socially acceptable and genteel —a nicer crime—than burglary, robbery or theft, all of which are rightly pursued by the police with great zeal, although, regrettably, with varying degrees of success. During the period of the Government, for every one person sent to jail for Inland Revenue fraud, 20 have been sent to jail for social security benefit fraud. It is no wonder that Mr. Walter Merricks calls for prison sentences for unscrupulous operators, both to deter fraud and to reassure the public that double standards are not being applied.

There is a strange whiff of those double standards in a circular issued to chief officers of police by the Home Office last February, and I should be grateful if the Minister would explain that when he replies. The circular, which is printed in the Roskill report, states:

"The following types of fraud case should also be reported to the Controller of FIG so that he may exercise his discretion whether they should be investigated by FIG."

He gives five categories where that procedure should apply. The fourth relates to people connected with Lloyd's of London, the stock exchange and other commercial exchanges, and the fifth involves well-known public figures — for example, Members of Parliament and captains of industry. Why is it believed that such people require special treatment before an investigation is authorised?

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): The right hon. Gentleman has unwittingly perpetrated or contributed to a widespread misunderstanding that prosecutions are initiated by the Government. He compared the zeal, or lack of it, with which the Government prosecute fraudsters with that with which they prosecute miners. Does he accept that, in the case of the Director of Public Prosecutions, a prosecution is initiated on the director's independent judgment—he is supervised by the Attorney-General, but there is no Government involvement — and that the miners' prosecutions were initiated by a county prosecuting solicitor at the instance of the chief officer of police? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that important distinction.

Mr. Kaufman: I have known the Solicitor-General for many years, and his integrity is absolute. I always accept what he says, but he misunderstands what I am seeking to say, and, indeed, what other people believe. Obviously, I know that the Government do not instigate prosecutions. Recent cases prove that, if anything could. The Solicitor-General acts independently, and resents it if there is any intrusion on his independence. On the other hand, there is what the judge who sentenced Sarah Tisdall called the "climate of the times". There is also the climate created by Ministers, such as the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks. (Mr. Brittan), who was Home Secretary when the trials were pending and called for heavy sentences on men who had still to be tried. That was prejudicial to those trials. Therefore, what the Solicitor-General said does not in any way contravene what I have said.

My point is borne out by a leading article in *The Times* which was published at the same time as the Bill—pre-Wapping. It states about the failure of the detection and prosecution system to bring most of the major professional fraudsters to court:

"In social terms that has led to a suspicion that the rich and well-connected can get away with it."

The Times knows a bit about the rich and well-connected. At the same time, the *Financial Times* warned even more emphatically at the conclusion of a leading article:

"the idea that white collar crime is somehow different is not one that society as a whole can tolerate."

Mr. Doiran Williams states of fraud:

"It is divisive in terms of class because where the law enforcement agencies fail—for whatever compelling reason—to prosecute those whose conduct has been demonstrably and grossly dishonest, the cry goes up that 'there is one law for them and another for us'."

It is extremely important that society should recognise that fraud is a crime more serious and more damaging than most others, but which is not pursued with the zeal and relentlessness that it should be. That is what the Roskill report is all about. That is why, with the exceptions that I have mentioned, we in the Labour party believe that the

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recommendations in the Roskill report form a firm basis for speedy action, and that the public is looking to Parliament for that speedy action.

7.57 pm

Mr. Mark Carlisle (Warrington, South): I hope that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will forgive me if I do not follow his latter remarks, but I wish to be brief. Many of the recommendations of the Roskill report go far beyond the ambit of serious fraud crimes, and it is a vital report.

We are right to be worried about fraud. The feeling that major fraud may go undetected, unprosecuted or unpunished would do immense damage to the international standing of our institutions, and it worries many people greatly. We are also right to be worried about what is happening at present in the investigation, prosecution and trial of cases. We should be worried that many people seem to disappear to other countries before we have an opportunity to bring them to trial, that some cases may not be brought to trial because of delay and their complexity and that there is delay in bringing cases to trial. Above all, we should be worried about the length, complexity and expense of trials.

I believe that Lord Roskill is right when he says that the present system is inadequate to bring the perpetrators of fraud effectively and expeditiously to trial, and that the opportunities to create delay and abuse within the system are too great to be acceptable. I suggest that the test against which this report should be judged is to ask whether its proposals reduce complexity. Do they reduce delay, or the length and expense of trials? Do they ensure expedition and efficiency? Those are the tests against which I propose to judge this report. I believe that those are the aims of many of the Roskill recommendations.

It is inevitable that there has been much public comment on the proposals on juries, and I shall state my views on that later.

I welcome particularly the proposals on pre-prosecution. It is important for counsel to be involved at an early stage, and on a full-time basis, if delay is to be avoided. I say that as someone who is in chambers where there are a fair number of Treasury counsel. I have seen the piles of paper which they are required to look through out of court hours, having been involved in other cases during the day. That is one of the practical problems that lead to delay.

I welcome Lord Roskill's proposals on committal proceedings. Fraud committal proceedings are expensive. They cause delay. I believe that they are largely unnecessary, and they can, by delay, be the subject of abuse.

For many years, most committals have been by means of paper committals. That system has worked well, but the time has come to look at the whole question of the right to full committal proceedings. If we are serious in our attempt to accept those recommendations which are aimed at reducing delay and complexity, and at speeding up the system, the replacement of committals by the system of a transfer certificate, with the right of application for discharge by the defendant through the trial judge, with or without the right of some form of limited cross-examination, is a sensible proposal which we should be willing to accept.

The proposals about evidence are even more important. I commend to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary the speech made my Lord Griffiths in another place. Frankly, I see no reason why the judge should not have the power to allow copies of documents, rather than originals, to be introduced. I see no reason why documents should not be allowed in certain cases to be evidence of the truth of the contents, without the necessity of calling the maker.

I believe that our rules of evidence are outmoded and that we, as lawyers, should not be unwilling to review these rules and change them where necessary. It is important that we should be able to get evidence from abroad taken on commission in cases of international crimes, as the report recommends. I believe that the proposals on evidence will go a long way towards meeting the proposals on mounting a prosecution and proving a fraud, and will help to shorten substantially, and thereby reduce, the complexity and nature of trials.

Most important of all are those proposals in chapter 6 of the report, beginning with pre-trial review. A pre-trial review is often of little value, and might well be described as a farce. It takes place before a judge, who is not the judge who will try the case, and usually with different counsel from those who will be involved in the case. The system must be improved if we are to use it as a means of simplifying the subsequent trial. The proposals by Lord Roskill go a long way towards that end.

Proper preparatory work, which is fairly remunerative is needed. I believe—I disagree with what the right hon. Member for Gorton said, although I agree with much of what he said about the report itself—that we have to accept the proposals in the report on the disclosure at an early stage of the outline of the case for the defence. That is not such a radical recommendation as might be thought. We have been doing that for some years with alibi defence and, so far as I know, we have done so without concern. If we are serious about tackling the problems of delay and complexity which the report has identified, we must be prepared to accept some radical departures from certain rules that we have accepted in the past as right for the conduct of criminal trials.

I welcome the proposals on the requirement to disclose the outline of the defence and the requirement for the defendant to admit facts in advance. If that is achieved, trials can be shortened and simplified, and the things that concern many of us in the report need not be considered. If the proposals that I have mentioned so far are implemented, they will go to the heart of the problem and do more than anything else to simplify, speed up and shorten the trial procedure, and thus ensure that justice is done.

I deal now with the comments on juries. I should not be sorry to see the peremptory challenge disappear. For the first 10 years of my life at the Bar I did not know whether that existed. I never heard it used on circuit, where I believe I was involved in a substantial junior criminal practice. The fashion of challenging juries came about after I went to the Old Bailey. I know that I express a minority view, and that many of my colleagues believe that they should have the right to challenge juries, but I have always stuck firmly to the view that although one has a right to be tried by one's peers, one does not have the right to select who those peers will be.

I have no doubt that while it is right and proper that defence counsel, so long as the power exists, should use the right of challenge, and should be responsible for using

it, in the interests of their clients, the fact is that it can be used to tip the balance in favour of the defendant in an unreasonable way. I should not be sorry to see it go.

Finally, I turn to a more fundamental proposal—that to change the mode of trial. I agree with almost everything that was said by the right hon. Member for Gorton, although he was a bit unfair to the committee, because the report makes it clear that the proposal is limited to complex fraud trials.

I commend to hon. Members the debate on this matter in the other House. It is interesting to note that the Law Lords seemed to favour the abolition of trial by jury, and that the one layman who spoke did so passionately in favour of retaining trial by jury. The arguments set out in the Roskill report do not justify a change of this nature.

The right hon. Member for Gorton referred to the paper published by the criminal law committee of the Law Society and the Criminal Bar Association, which said that to do away with juries would raise grave constitutional issues. I do not believe that the case for ignoring those grave constitutional issues is made out in the report. I prefer the arguments advanced by Mr. Walter Merricks in his note of dissent. The evidence of those who were involved, both on the side of the prosecution and of the defence, the police and others, was in favour of retaining juries. I do not like the idea of changing the system so that people are sent to prison for long periods without first going through the accepted method of trial which we have always used.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that it is unnecessary at this stage to pursue that recommendation. I believe that there is no evidence that juries are not working. There is certainly no serious evidence that they unduly acquit. I do not believe that there is any evidence that cases are not being brought to trial because of their complexity, as the right hon. Member for Gorton said. The real objection to jurors in these fraud cases is the unbearable strain imposed on jurors by the length and complexity of the case that they are asked to try.

I believe that, sensibly used, the report's other recommendations will lead to greater simplification and understanding of the issues involved and shorter trials. I think, therefore that one objection to the continuation of jury trial—the unbearable strain on juries, as trials of between four months and six months in the Old Bailey make clear—and the raison d'etre for the recommendation to abolish juries are removed.

I was delighted at the tenor of the speech by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I hope that he is willing to be bold with regard to the other proposals. I hope that he will stand up to the objections that may be made by members of my profession, although we must obviously look at the details. I hope also that he will turn his face against the proposal to do away with juries as a means of trial.

8.11 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The prevalence of financial fraud is deeply worrying. It is important to the good name of our City and financial institutions that all possible steps are taken to minimise its impact and to detect and punish the perpetrators in an exemplary fashion. The Roskill report is welcome because the committee has authoritatively and speedily brought forward extremely practical suggestions which, if implemented, will do a great deal to remove public anxiety that fraudsters can slip through the net of our criminal justice system.

The Roskill committee produced a large number of proposals which the House should welcome. I wholly agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle) about the importance of properly handling pre-trial procedures. As I agree with him, it is not necessary for me to comment in detail on the bulk of those points.

I warn against the Secretary of State paying too much attention to the opening statements of the Roskill committee. Perhaps understandably for the progenitors of such an authoritative report, the members of the Roskill committee sought to have the Government treat all the proposals as though they were interdependent and could not be viewed in isolation without damaging the effectiveness of the report. Page 2 of the report states:

> "It follows that substantial alteration of any of our proposals may do damage to the structure of the whole."

I hope that the Government will not flinch from the task of rejecting some of the report's major proposals on those grounds. There is no doubt that the House would agree with Lord Roskill's general perception that, if self-regulatory mechanisms are abused, the law must deliver swift and sure retribution.

The Government have not so far had regard to the need to increase the resources of those responsible for the detection of fraud. The Home Secretary suggested that he was proceeding in a somewhat leisurely way to deal with the requests of the Metropolitan police for an increase in resources and establishment numbers. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) dealt at some length with the resources issue. It is not necessary for me to delay the debate by doing more than adopting the arguments he deployed about the lack of police resources. The Home Secretary shakes his head. I hope that that does not mean that he considers that resources are adequate.

Mr. Hurd: The bottleneck is not at the first or police stage. That is why it is especially important that the Department of Trade and Industry and the Director of Public Prosecutions have been able to announce substantial increases in their staff.

Mr. Maclennan: I have no doubt that there is a bottleneck such as the right hon. Gentleman describes and that there should be staff increases. I think that many members of the police force, at all levels, would strongly disagree with the right hon. Gentleman's somewhat complacent view about the capacity of police fraud squads to tackle the problems. I hope that the Home Secretary will not take refuge in that. I recognise that there are public expenditure implications and that the right hon. Gentleman will have to persuade his colleagues that it is necessary to meet these charges if we are to take seriously his claim to be tackling the problem. No doubt we shall wish to return on another occasion to the resources issue.

The report raises major issues of principle with respect to criminal procedure. It proposes that there should be pre-trial disclosure of the case of the defence. I disagree with the right hon. Member for Gorton. I believe that the committee put forward a strong argument that there is a case for much more openness about the nature — although not the evidence that will be led — of the defence. This aspect of the criminal law should be

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reviewed in the round. Unfortunately, consideration of these sensible proposals has been set back by the monumentally silly recommendation in 1972 by the Criminal Law Revision Committee that accused persons must disclose their offence at the police station. If disclosure is to take place, it should be only after the defendant has seen in writing how the prosecution has put its case and after he has had access to proper legal advice. It follows that the prosecution must be required to set out its case in an intelligible way, with a proper and particularised narrative, not just a formal indictment and a pile of statements by witnesses.

There must be other safeguards. If one goes down this route, it will be necessary to ensure that the prosecution has only a limited right to amend its case. On the other hand, the defence should have an unlimited right to amend its case, although it would then risk adverse comments about inconsistency. There would also have to be safeguards to ensure that the prosecution could not nobble defence witnesses whose identity had been revealed by the written statement of case.

I am hostile to the idea of the Government embarking upon this important reform in fraud cases alone. The Roskill Committee said that before implementation this question should be looked at more widely.

I shall deal next with the right of peremptory challenge of jurors. I am not persuaded that it should be abandoned in fraud cases. I understood the Home Secretary to say that the Crown prosecution service will conduct a general survey of the practice of peremptory challenge in all criminal cases. A cautious approach would lead to an appraisal of the evidence and to an examination of the use of peremptory challenge and whether or not it ought to be retained. That must be a necessary precursor to any change in the law. There is no reason for fraud cases to be treated in a different way from other cases.

If the right of peremptory challenge were to be removed, there would inevitably be pressure for the prolonged cross-examination and investigation of potential jurors to determine whether they should be excluded for cause. That risk will have to be considered by the Government. In practice, peremptory challenge allows defendants to feel that they have a certain say in the determination of the jury panel, and it prevents most of the argument and resentment that would otherwise occur. It is not a wholly rational system, but it seems to work. A considerable onus is placed upon those who seek to displace it to demonstrate that it does not work. That is what the Crown prosecution service will seek to determine in its objective appraisal of the evidence.

I shall now deal with what is undoubtedly the most controversial part of the recommendations: the right of an accused person to trial by jury. The arguments were best summarised in Mr. Merricks' minority report. His arguments are extremely compelling. Both the Social Democratic party and the Liberal party are strongly opposed to the abandonment of trial by jury in complex fraud cases. I hope that the Government will resist the recommendations, for reasons that I shall seek to deploy.

Juries, though inexpert, are not necessarily more stupid than judges, lawyers, accountants and bankers. Counsel's task is to seek to explain the issues to the jury in a manner that enables it to reach a correct conclusion. That task is not beyond counsel. It was not demonstrated to the Roskill Commission that the task is beyond their capacity. It is notable that the evidence led by those who are most closely associated with fraud trials—barristers and solicitors—was overwhelmingly against the view that juries reach the wrong decision. I make also a Scottish point, that in Scotland juries try all cases, however complex, without even the benefit of an opening statement. They have to pick up the case as it is put to them. Juries represent the popular, democratic element in the administration of justice. Without juries, the criminal law becomes a closed affair for experts.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): If the hon. Gentleman were to be transported to Canada, where he would be entitled to choose between either trial by jury or trial by a judge and assessors if he were charged with commercial fraud, of which he knew he was innocent, would he prefer to be tried by a jury that did not understand the issues or by a judge and assessors who did understand them?

Mr. Maclennan: That point was dealt with effectively by the right hon. Member for Gorton. I do not believe that trial by experts is necessarily in the interests of the accused. If a crime of dishonesty has been committed, that is not essentially a technical question. Although the facts may be complex it can easily be assessed by the ordinary man or woman. The system has served us well.

Mr. Lawrence: Of course a jury can understand all the complexities of a fraud trial, but it takes much longer to inform a jury of those complexities than it takes to inform a tribunal. Does the hon. Gentleman think that very substantial savings in time and therefore in delay could be made if a tribunal was available in some circumstances for very long and complex fraud trials?

Mr. Maclennan: No, I do not. The right hon. and learned Member for Warrington, South dealt effectively with that argument. He pointed out that if the other recommendations of Roskill were to be adopted—namely, pre-trial procedures, the involvement of counsel at an early stage, and a narrowing down of the issues, which is why it is important to look at the statement of the case for the defence—it should be possible greatly to limit the length of a trial. Furthermore, Roskill is perfectly frank about the fact that relatively few cases continue for many months. That does not mean that the time cases take in the courts is acceptable. The length of many of them is unacceptable. There is the problem of witnesses who have a sharp recollection of events having to be called after a case has dragged on for months. Justice is not served by the prolongation of trials. I think that the problem of the prolongation of trials and the difficulties for juries must be tackled before the case reaches that stage.

I was dealing with a wider point—the importance of the role of the jury. I believe that the jury legitimises the exercise by the state of the power to deprive citizens of their liberty for prolonged periods. On rare occasions it can also stand between the citizen and the law and acquit where common morality, decency or sense say one thing and the law says another. I think that that is rather a difficult concept for law-makers to accept, but I think that there have been cases in the memory of the House where that has happened. Having said that, I recognise that those cases place great burdens upon the jury. I think that the judge should have the right to ask the jurors if they

consider that the issues are such that they would find it difficult to come to a conclusion and if they wish to withdraw. There should be literacy tests in cases where there is likely to be documentary evidence. We should also look at the possibility of extending the use of special verdicts, asking a jury to answer specific questions, for example, whether the defendant is dishonest instead of whether he is guilty or not guilty.

On the central issue of whether we should adopt the suggestion of a judge and two expert assessors, in my view the Roskill committee did not make the case that the present system leads to miscarriages of justice or to prosecutions not being successfully brought. It was rightly pointed out that there was only anecdotal evidence and that the overwhelming majority of those who were closely associated with the trials believe that juries came to the right view, or, at least, an understandable view.

The constitutional issue to which Mr. Merricks attached great importance is one to which the alliance parties also attach great importance. The right to elect for a trial by jury in any allegation of dishonesty is one that we should not proceed to dismantle. Let it be clear that dishonesty is an element in many cases other than fraud and, if one steps down that road, the logic of proceeding beyond fraud trials to others will, I am afraid, be pressed by those who wish to tighten the screws of the criminal justice system.

The problem of the definition of a complex case has not been satisfactorily resolved by the Roskill report. Mr. Merricks' rather powerful example of the public incomprehension which would follow in denying the right to a trial by jury to a man who has stolen £1 million by the use of a computer and allowing it to a man who has stolen £1 million from a bank by the use of a gun is one which should be in the Government's mind. I hope that the Government will also bear in mind the probability, indeed virtual certainty, that if a fraud tribunal were established there would be an appeal against its findings. I think that where reasons are given it would be very easy to erect an appeal. That process would lead to a prolongation of the trial which would be opposed to the general thrust of the report.

I think that this has been a most valuable report and that the overwhelming number of its recommendations should be implemented with all possible speed. The importance of the jury has been re-emphasised in public perception as a result of the two Official Secrets Act prosecutions—the Ponting case and the Cyprus secrets trial. I do not believe that the House would be right to accept any proposal to abandon something which has been a fundamental protection of our citizens' rights for centuries.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I remind the House of Mr. Speaker's plea for brief speeches.

8.35 pm

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): I hope to respond immediately to that plea. The House owes an enormous debt to Lord Roskill and his colleagues for the time and expertise put into producing the report. We also owe a considerable debt to Mr. Walter Merricks. I say that not merely because he is my wife's nephew, but for two other reasons. I once made a dissenting report and I know what it means to do that. The second and the main reason is that I agree with so much of what he says. He will know that that has not always been the case.

I want to concentrate on making one point arising from the report. The two principal features in the report are pre-trial preparation and whether we should do away with juries in fraud cases.They are intimately bound up with one another. I think that there are constitutional and philosophical reasons for keeping jury trials in cases where the consequences may be serious for the accused. I also think that there are both emotional and logical reasons for keeping juries in such cases.

However, there is an even better, and practical, reason why we should not try to implement that recommendation at the moment. That is the fundamental reason put forward by the Roskill committee for abolishing juries, namely the complexity of certain fraud trials. Looking at it practically, one of the major reasons why cases are so complicated when they get to trial is that they have not been properly prepared. I do not say that as a criticism of anybody involved. At every stage, those who have to prepare the trials are having to overcome practical obstacles that would defeat most people. It is a miracle that some of the cases come to trial in as orderly fashion as they do.

I want to support with all the emphasis that I can the recommendation that we should look urgently at preparations for trial—all pre-trial stages—and here we have a large number of positive recommendations. I doubt whether everybody would agree with every one of them but I am sure that everybody would agree that that is what we have to look at first. I believe that the Criminal Bar Association also has some further proposals in that area.

My plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench is to concentrate on that part of the report and get on with it, with all the assistance possible. I am sure that both sides of the profession will give their help. A lot of advice might also be obtained from the accountants, many of whom are now specialising in doing the groundwork in preparing cases for a fraud trial. Let us see how far we can get in simplifying the trial itself before we contemplate doing away with what, after all, has been regarded in this country for a very long time, as one of the principal safeguards of the liberty of the subject. I do not say that that tradition can justify sticking with one system for ever in all cases, but it should make us slow in abolishing it and especially abolishing it in any trial where the consequences for the accused of being found guilty may be very serious.

My plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends is get on with it. I am not just supporting the recommendations concerning pre-trial matters. My plea is, let us get on with them, with considering and implementing the improvements we can make in pre-trial preparation just as quickly as possible. The beauty of it is that hardly any of that needs legislation. All that it needs is the will to get on with it. Let us leave other considerations about juries until we have tackled this first and done something about it.

8.39 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I have one slight advantage in these matters because I have prepared trials in the past and have trials prepared for me in the present. There is a world of difference between looking at a set of papers that have been prepared for one and a set of papers that one has prepared oneself. The basis behind any prosecution is the quality of preparation, which

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

is why I endorse almost everything that the right hon. and learned Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) has said. He is so right. The difficulty with fraud trials, whether one defends or prosecutes, is the way in which they are prepared and presented. It takes just a little effort and careful constructive thought to assemble the evidence in a format easily understood by anybody.

I can take a simple example from experience. About 10 years ago, a series of fraud trials were prepared by the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, concerning the quality of scrap going into steel works. When the first case eventually came to trial, there were mounds of paper about a mile high. I had the job of preparing the defence and all I did was stand on a bridge and watch a scrap train going by underneath. I realised that one could see the quality of the scrap in the wagons, with tyres sticking up, and various bits and lumps. I then went to look at a mound of scrap in a British Steel Corporation scrap yard. I saw on that mound of scrap, which had been bought and paid for, all the things that were being complained about in the case. In other words, the British Steel Corporation had been buying what was described as fraudulent. The trial collapsed simply because the defence prepared its case by going to have a look.

That example involved allegations about millions of pounds. If those who prepared prosecutions took similar simple steps, the most complex case could be reduced to the most simple terms, and cases could be so much more straightforward. Such preparation would take increased resources, increased manpower in the DPP office and the police force involving employment of counsel and solicitors at an early stage and the creation of a team. All those matters are in the Roskill report and can be implemented straight away.

Roskill has many gems in it, but unfortunately it also has a few flawed stones. The flawed stones come in recommendations 57 to 61 and the later recommendations about the right of disclosure. I take issue with the right hon. and learned Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle) who said that we have had alibi disclosure for some years. That is a different matter because an alibi is merely somebody saying, "I was not there." The mischief that was overcome by the creation of the rules about the disclosure of alibi was that of the suddenly sprung witness. The defence is, "I was not there. I am not part of this affair."

Mr. Hickmet: Or, "I was somewhere else."

Mr. Bermingham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, if the Roskill recommendations are implemented, the defence will be called upon to disclose the whole nature of the defence case. That will effectively remove the right of silence. We shall again begin to turn the format of a trial into something approaching the French system of proof of defence. If the prosecution knows what the defence will say, it will target its opening statement and witnesses towards the defence case.

We then have the appalling suggestion—I put it as bluntly as that—that the prosecution and the judge, in almost a team effort, can comment on the failure to disclose. All of us who have been involved in trials, whether on the prosecution or the defence side, know only too well that it is something said, perhaps by a witness, that may open up new lines of defence, ones that had not been canvassed or thought of before the trial began. If that becomes the principal line of defence, are the judge and the prosecution to comment and seek to discredit on the basis that it had not been anticipated? How often has one seen a witness statement that looked perfect and damning, but when the witness stood in the witness box, he failed to live up to the words that he had written on the paper?

We are talking about human beings giving evidence, not about computerised paper exercises. To remove the right to silence, as the Roskill proposals would, and to begin to shift the onus away from the prosecution proving its case towards the defence establishing its case and proving it, would go to the heart of the system of British justice which says that it is for the prosecution to prove its case.

In this Chamber, I do not have to remind many of the right hon. and hon. Members present that it was not until the end of the last century that the defendant was even allowed to speak in his defence. It is only in the past 80 years that he has had the right to say something. Very often, the defendant says nothing. However, if we implement the Roskill recommendation, we shall start down the road of the defence having to be proved.

Many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall be as brief as possible. I take on board and agree with everything that has been said about retaining the right to challenge and the right to a jury trial. It does not need to be said again by me. The fundamental rights in our system should remain. However, I draw the Government's attention to recommendation 41, which suggests that fair and adequate remuneration should be paid to those involved in such work. This may be the first time that this subject comes to the Floor of the House. I declare my own interest in this matter as a practising member of the Bar.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) might have a word in the ears of the Solicitor-General, the Attorney-General and the Lord Chancellor and point out that even Mr. Roskill thinks that lawyers properly paid might help the service, and that applies generally and not just to complex fraud trials. I have taken the opportunity to raise that matter, which is a burning issue. The quality of those who either prosecute or defend, who prepare either for the prosecution or the defence leads to the quality of justice that we have had in this country for so many years. It would be a sad and sorry day when those skilled and able in these sectors felt it necessary to leave the profession because they could not afford to make ends meet.

Justice is sometimes expensive. By and large, these recommendations should set us on the road to even better quality justice. However, some of the recommendations should be cast aside because they will not enhance the quality of justice.

8.49 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): I agree with those hon. Members who have said that most of the Roskill recommendations in the first six chapters of the report should be implemented. I especially mention the proposal for a fraud commission, case controllers and the importance of legal advice at an early stage of the investigation.

There is much scope for sensible relaxations of the rules of evidence and for greater measures of disclosure. I agree with the comments on that matter of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr.

Carlisle). The position mentioned by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), could be coped with within the proposals. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to better facilities for judges. I remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of what was said by Lord Edmund-Davies in the debate in the other place about facilities for juries, which is especially important when considering jury trials.

Lord Devlin said that the right to trial by jury has come to be regarded as a constitutional right for trials on serious criminal charges. Recently, several leading judges have suggested that jury trials should be restricted in cases of less serious crime. Lord Roskill suggests a substantial restriction at the serious end of the criminal scale. I agree with the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that the majority of people in Britain believe that juries bring a valuable element of good sense and human experience to the legal system. That is generally appreciated throughout the country.

If a major change is to be made to the jury system, such a change should not be made as a result of a side wind in this report, but as a result of a thorough investigation ranging across the board of jury trials. It would be wrong of the Government to seek to restrict jury trials on the basis of a report on fraud.

There are more serious and detailed reasons in the report that should lead the Government not to accept the recommendations in relation to juries. The only research in the report is mentioned in paragraph 8.11, which shows that

"in almost six cases out of seven there was no serious complaint about the jury's verdict from most of the participants contacted. None of the questionable acquittals in their sample of cases involved complex fraud and very few were the result of lengthy or involved trials."

Regarding the operation of the jury system in fraud cases, paragraph 8.12 of the report states:

"We think that, in general, the public believes that juries provide a satisfactory method of trial and this view is held by many of our witnesses."

Another factor to be considered is the number of trials that fall in the category defined in the Roskill report. It is clear from paragraph 8.3 that there are relatively few cases involved. It states:

"In the five years from 1979 to 1983 there was a yearly average of 26 fraud trials each lasting for longer than 20 working days . . . The longest single fraud trial lasted 137 working days."

The number of trials and the length of cases are inadequate to justify a radical change in the jury system, especially when the perception of the performance of juries is that generally they work satisfactorily.

We have sometimes received complaints about judges and lawyers, but the number of complaints by members of the public, who have served on juries, about their experience of the length and hardship of trials is small in relation to other complaints about the Legal system. That demonstrates the fact that far from being overwhelmed by the so-called hardships mentioned in the report, most members of the public who are required on jury service, even on long trials, treat them as a duty of citizenship and a contribution that they are willing to make to the administration of justice.

8.56 pm

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): If the proposals in the report are adopted, they will represent a fundamental overhaul of court room procedure designed to improve investigation, preparation and presentation of fraud cases. Issues will be more readily identified through the pre-trial review procedure. Presentation of cases will be clearer and more easy to understand and rules of evidence will be modernised and made more effective. Trials will be shorter and will come to the Crown court more quickly.

However, I have grave misgivings about the recommendations about the jury system. Jurors in all criminal cases should be able to read, write and to be numerate, let alone speak English. That proposition is so self-evident that no justification is needed. However, it is a remarkable thing that in fraud cases it is not unusual when the jury is empanelled to discover that some jurors cannot read.

Apart from the welcome recommendations on the literacy and numeracy of jurors, the report contains a detailed attack on the jury system. It attacks not only the challenging of jurers by counsel, but the hearing of complex fraud trials by juries and other general matters. Perhaps the system of challenging juries has been abused. It is not unusual for counsel to give the impression that they are challenging jurors simply to obtain a jury that is weighted more towards the acquittal of the defendant than a just verdict.

The report makes a comprehensive attack on the jury system and then seeks to say that, for the reasons set out in the report and because complex fraud trials are difficult for jurors to follow, trials which fall within certain guidelines should no longer be tried by judge and jury, only by judge and two lay assessors in the form of a fraud trials tribunal. We should welcome the fact that Mr. Walter Merricks was a member of the commission and produced his minority report.

Lord Justice Roskill said that trial by a jury selected at random is a major contributing factor in preventing fraud cases from being brought to trial. He said that the difficulty of presenting a complex case often results in a decision to opt for a less serious charge. There is no evidence for those two propositions. There is no evidence to show that a jury cannot understand a complex financial fraud case if it does not know the background, let alone the dishonest elements.

The minority report shows that, in 1983, of the 179 cases referred to the fraud division of the Director of Public Prosecutions for a decision on prosecution, only one case was not prosecuted on the grounds of complexity. That occurred on the advice of independent counsel and was an intellectual property case. Of the yearly average of 10 long fraud cases tried at the Old Bailey between 1979 and 1983, almost none was a complex fraud case that would be covered by the guidelines. There were carbon paper frauds, Spanish villa frauds and estate agent frauds, none of which could be defined as complex fraud cases.

The thrust of the Commission's recommendations is to reform procedure, presentation and rules of evidence so that that type of case can be understood by a jury. It is illogical to make those recommendations, and then to say, "But the jury system in those cases should be removed in any event." We are told that defendants are no longer tried by juries selected at random because of the exclusions and that, accordingly, those who fill the jury box are not a true cross-section of the public. It is my impression that the

[Mr. Richard Hickmet]

vast majority of people are not doctors, Members of Parliament, policemen or clergymen. The vast number of people who enter jury boxes represent society as a whole.

The report also argues that, because the vast majority of legal cases in England and Wales are heard by skilled people, whether in the magistrates courts, county courts, Queen's Bench courts or even in front of the 60 specialist tribunals, including those on immigration and social benefits, it is sentimental or illogical to retain jury trials in the Crown court. That is an extraordinary proposition. How many of those tribunals have the power to send a man to prison for life or, indeed, for more than one year? Not one. How many of those tribunals, with the exception of magistrates courts, have the power to find a man guilty of a criminal offence? Not one. How many defendants at the magistrates courts, when given the choice, opt for trial before the magistrates court rather than trial by jury? That represents many hundreds of thousands of cases each year.

The report makes serious and damaging attacks on juries. It is essential, as Mr. Merricks said in his minority report, that the general public, as represented by the jury system and the press, should be able to understand complex fraud cases. The challenge to the criminal justice system must be to make such cases understandable to the general public and the press. No man should be sent to prison for a period of up to life imprisonment without being tried by a jury. As Mr. Merricks said powerfully, why should a man have the right to trial by jury because he commits an armed robbery with a sawn-off shotgun and steals £1 million, whereas if he used a computer to carry out a complex fraud, that right could be removed? I welcome the report's recommendations about the investigation and presentation of cases but I hope that my right hon. Friend will reject the suggestion that jury trials in those case should be removed.

Mr. Speaker: Unhappily, my request for short speeches was not followed—one Back Bench speech lasted for no less than 25 minutes. If the hon. Members now waiting to be called will speak for five minutes each, I will be able to call all of them.

9.6 pm

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): I wish to make five points. The first concerns committal proceedings. The Psalmist said:

"One day in my courts is better than a thousand."

However, when I sat through 80 days of committal proceedings at the Lambeth magistrates court, I felt that one day in court was like a thousand. The way in which contemporary committal proceedings are conducted is, for the most part, entirely futile. They are expensive and I support the Roskill committee and the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure in saying goodbye to all that.

My second point concerns the desirability of investigation and co-ordination. Without doubt it is desirable. In the Richmond Rendezvous case part of the inquiry was conducted by officers of the Customs and Excise who dealt with the value added tax aspects of the case. The remainder of the case was dealt with by officers from the Inland Revenue who dealt with PAYE and schedule D. There were two investigating officers, two sets of solicitors and two sets of instructions. Each party arranged themselves on opposite sides of my table and glowered at each other with professional jealousy. It is time to end all that.

My third point relates to the abolition of jury trial. In a sentence I would say to the Government, "Forget about abolishing jury trial and forget it straight away."

My fourth point concerns the conduct of the trial. This is where the most speedy action can be taken. There is much that the judges can do by displaying an aggresive attitude during pre-trial reviews. Severance in appropriate cases works wonders. I am convinced that we must compel disclosure by the defence of their defence. We have abolished trial by combat, but perpetuate trial by ambush. There is nothing to justify the prolongation of the right to silence into the trial. That is consistent neither with common sense nor morality.

My fifth point relates to extradition. Many of the problems of fraud concern extradition. Mr. Pepperel, in the London and County bank case, was extradited from West Germany, and Mr. Caplan so used the judicial process in America that the energetic efforts of the Director of Public Prosecutions were not able to bring him back to this country. That is regrettable, but unfortunately it happened.

Although the report raises many points of law, the most important point is a political point that requires action, and we ignore that at our peril.

9.9 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The Roskill report is splendid, but I have strong reservations about it. Mainly this is because Roskill allocates too much of the blame for fraud to the current procedure for conducting fraud trials and so suggests remedies which are quite unnecesarily radical.

Since more people are convicted in fraud trials than for most other offences, it ought not to be the trial procedure that causes concern. What worries people is that City swindlers go abroad and cannot be extradited back to England, that dishonest City men are given immunity from prosecution if they give evidence before internal, self-regulating City institutions' own tribunals and that some fraudsters never come to trial because the resources of police manpower, accountancy, expertise and investigative procedures are inadequate to bring them to justice.

Tackling the extradition law and strengthening powers of investigation, establishing a fraud investigation group, and making available more police, legal and accountancy resources for the pursuit of the fraudulent is where the emphasis should lie.

Roskill's proposals for the improvement of investigation, preparation, presentation at court, training, and staffing resources are desirable and most welcome.

We must pause for deep thought over Roskill's proposals to take fraud out of the criminal justice system as we know it—a system which is designed to secure the conviction of the guilty by fair means and the acquittal of the innocent. If we are panicked into doing anything which undermines our trust in the legal system as being just, we threaten one of the most important pillars of our society.

I am not sure how useful some of the Roskill recommendations will be. I do not feel strongly about paper committals, but the proposals go in the opposite direction to that which many of us had said should happen

—we should use committal proceedings far more to ensure that inadequate cases are thrown out before time and money are wasted further up the ladder.

Pre-trial reviews—the so-called tea parties—are a notorious waste of time and will only work if the legal aid fund becomes so generous that the trial barrister can be guaranteed to attend and the list office can ensure that the trial judge is present. Both are somewhat optimistic expectations.

In a fraud trial, someone is deceived by a false representation into doing something that is against his or her interests. That is often the central element of all sorts of other criminal offences—rape, treason, tax evasion, and bilking a fare or a restaurant bill. Fraud cases are not always the most complex. There are treason, drug and even murder cases where the competence of a jury of ordinary people can be taxed.

How long will it be before what Roskill proposes for fraud will be extended to other complex cases of deception? If the law does not so develop, why not?

Where will be the logic of requiring the disclosure of the defence in one case rather than another? *Justice* in a commentary upon Roskill puts it this way:

"Why should a defendant accused of deceiving an insurance company into wrongly parting with money be obliged to disclose his defence but not the defendant who has deceived a restaurateur into parting with a meal for which he does not intend to pay or a women into consenting to sexual relations for favours which he does not intend to provide?"

The law must apply evenly and it will not so apply if some of the Roskill proposals are implemented. It will become distorted.

I come to juries. The peremptory challenge may be irritating, although only in cases where there are a large number of defendants can it be used to tailor a jury. To abolish it, will cause all sorts of problems. We are already moving towards tailored juries with jury vetting and a kind of voire dire. If the safety valve of the peremptory challenge goes, there will be more and more challenges for cause in terrorist or gangland trials and the limitations of the challenge for cause will be exposed. There will be pressure for it to be extended. we shall be sliding down the slippery slope to the crazy United States system of jury selection before we know it. How then will the jury system have been improved?

There is another reason. Trials only progress with the co-operation of the accused. They believe the system to be fair because they can challenge a juryman without reason. Deprive a defendant of that right and he will feel frustrated and railroaded by a court which, so he may think, has rigged the jury against him. If the police are allowed to vet the jury, that will be an active fear. For the sake of five minutes delay in court time, some trials will become much more difficult to conduct.

We must think longer and more clearly about the abolition of trial by jury in complex fraud cases than about anything else. I share most of the views that have been expressed by colleagues on both sides of the House against abolition and I shall not repeat them.

However, I do recognise the attractiveness of the proposal for special tribunals for they will speed up proceedings. A jury may very well understand a fraud trial, but the point is that it will take many days to explain the balance sheet and all the procedures so that they do understand it. A special tribunal would be able to work overnight, understand the case and dispatch the trial with greater speed. Furthermore, innocent people might well welcome specialist tribunals rather than a jury in a complex case. The standards of probity involved in City institutions might not be readily understood by the ordinary man in the street. Such defendants might prefer to have a special tribunal.

I would rather that juries stay as they are. If we do give way to pressure to have such tribunals may I suggest that the Government should set up a pilot scheme for such tribunals which should operate for two years. A defendant should have the option of such a tribunal. If it were shown to produce satisfactory results for innocent defendants, the objections to the abolition of the jury from those who are worried that it would produce a procedure weighted against the accused would be dispelled.

Finally, there is no point in catching fraudsters and convicting them if there is no deterrent in the sentence they receive. *Justice* states:

"Sentences are far too lenient and the proceeds of crime are rarely recovered. Fraud, like other varieties of criminal conduct, will only diminish once those who perpetrate it realise that no profit is to be gained from it."

The Roskill report was not empowered to consider the consequences of conviction. Should we not at the very least be strengthening the powers of the court so that they may confiscate the defendant's property which could be reasonably attributable to the proceeds of fraud? That is what the Hodgson committee recommended and that is what the Government are currently implementing in its Drug Trafficking Offences Bill. We should do the same in fraud cases.

9.17 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): I shall be brief. May I draw the Home Secretary's attention to the section of the report which calls for organisation reform in combating fraud. The report rightly points out that there is great fragmentation in the co-ordination of the drive against criminal fraudsters.

The report calls for a single unified organisation which will detect, investigate, and prosecute under one roof. That is a recommendation that should be taken on board. However, if that course of action should prove to be impossible, I think that the report's recommendation that a fraud commission should be established to monitor the fight against fraud would result in co-ordination.

The difficulty of obtaining evidence from overseas is not dealt with in the report. I should like to float the idea of an international subpoena. At present getting witnesses from overseas is a costly, time-consuming business, but an international subpoena would have some merit.

One of the difficulties of this type of debate is that it attracts the hon. Members who are here tonight, all of whom are lawyers. This reminds me of a saying of Charles de Gaulle, "If you want to drain a swamp don't ask the frogs for their opinion." I am in a minority of one tonight. The Roskill report questioned whether it was appropriate to retain juries or whether there was another more suitable process. Would trials with a judge and assessors be fairer and shorter? I think trials would be shorter if one had a judge and assessors as illustrated by an example in the report. A trial under the Exchange Control Act 1947, conducted by the City magistrates, was considered by the counsel for both sides to have been three or four times shorter than it would otherwise have been. I was pleased to hear that the chairman of the Criminal Bar Association at a Back-Bench committee meeting also agreed that trials would be shorter if there was a judge and assessors.

[Mr. Richard Ottaway]

Whether fraud trials would be fairer without a jury is a question which causes me, as someone who is especially interested in these issues, the greatest difficulty. As the report states, about 2·2 million accused are tried each year by magistrates, and 90 per cent. of those who appear before magistrates plead guilty. That leaves about 200,000 a year who are tried by magistrates, having pleaded not guilty. We must bear in mind that magistrates have the power to impose fines of up to £50,000, and in some instances to impose one-year sentences of imprisonment. These facts illustrate that suitably qualified individuals can make judgments that are accepted by society. They illustrate also that juries are not enirely necessary.

Can juries determine honesty? They can do so only if they understand the questions that are before them. Reference has not been made to the report produced by the applied psychology unit of Cambridge, which comes to the conclusion that honesty is the most difficult question for juries to resolve in complex trials. It states:

"laymen experience difficulty in understanding and retaining unfamiliar and complex information over 20 days."

How do I, as someone who is particularly interested in civil liberties, face this difficult issue? If there is difficulty in determining honesty and a jury experiences problems with the complex issues that are before it, it is an even greater breach of an individual's right to be tried by 12 jurors who do not understand the evidence than to be tried by a tribunal, or judge and two assessors, who do. To my surprise, I find that I have no objection to trial by a tribunal of judge and two assessors.

I take on board the suggestion that a choice be given to defendants. Such a scheme has been put into effect in Canada, where I understand that the majority of defendants opt for trial by judge and assessors. If someone is innocent and he is charged with a commercial fraud, I am sure that he would far rather be tried by a judge and assessors, who understand completely all the issues with which they are presented, than by a jury which has only a hazy understanding of them.

When my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary considers the combined force of the lawyers' lobby in Parliament, which I believe is nearly 100 strong, and the weight of the Opposition, including the thunderous weight of the alliance, I believe that their opinions could force the Government into accepting the proposition that we cannot abandon jury trials, but I believe that a satisfactory compromise would be to give defendants a choice in the method of trial.

9.24 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): The Roskill report has many good features, but it contains one or two conclusions with which I disagree, and I wish briefly to explain why.

First, I urge my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and his ministerial team to reject the idea of abolishing jury trial for serious fraud cases. There is no evidence that juries are failing in their duty to grasp the problems and the facts in a complex fraud trial. Jurors are probably the best people to grasp the concept of honesty or dishonesty.

The major problem that we are facing lies in the preparation of cases and the putting of them before the courts. In that context, the report deals fully and adequately with simplifying the issues so that a jury may deal with them more properly. The research of Baldwin and McConville in 1979 showed that none of the perverse verdicts that they recorded were associated with fraud cases. Frauds show no higher or lower levels of convictions or acquittals than any other type of case, and to argue that they are too complex to be dealt with by juries is to fail to understand that juries deal with cases equally complex day after day in our courts.

The second point is on the abolition of peremptory challenge to juries. I take the view that this is one thing that we should set aside. We should keep the peremptory challenge. In fraud cases, above all, it is better to retain it, for the simple reason that a juror who cannot read the oath is not able to grasp the complexities of the balance sheet or documentation. We will finish up going down the road of the ridiculous performance in the American courts, where they spend as much time empanelling the jury as they do in opening the case.

Mr. Lawrence: More.

Mr. Hind: As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) says, probably a lot more.

I urge my hon. Friend the Home Secretary to be very careful when he tampers with the right of silence of a defendant as we know it. The disclosure of the defence should be done extremely carefully, and not until all the prosecution case is made available. I would undertake that only with a great deal of reservation, and it has to be very carefully thought out.

I welcome the fraud commission proposal. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will consider placing a duty upon auditors of public companies not only to audit the books but to report any irregularities to the police or to the DTI. This will lead to the introduction of further investigations in fraud cases.

Bearing those facts in mind, I think that this is a good report. I welcome it. It will lead to a much more cogent and sensible approach to the problems of fraud.

9.26 pm

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): There are so many good features of the Roskill report that I hope the Government will not be tempted to obscure their value or jeopardise their implementation by accepting, at least at this stage, the proposal to abolish juries for complex fraud cases.

The key features start with investigation. We must, in my view, establish a team of investigators, with proper qualifications, and a long-term career structure. The understanding of the patterns of behaviour in fraud, the kind of documentation to be mastered, the nature of the opportunities for fraud in different fields — insurance investment, commodity trading and the long firm fraud — can be mastered only by matching the expertise of the fraudster with equivalent experience in the investigator. The staff of such a corps of investigators must have time to build up a rapport with those responsible for self-regulation in the markets in question. This can be done only if they remain in their profession, not merely for tours of duty for two or three years, as so often happens at present, but for long periods equivalent to those undertaken by professional accountants, lawyers, tax inspectors or customs officials specialising in particular fields.

The Roskill report rightly refers to the vast amount of documentation to be found in some cases. I know from my

own experience in large commercial cases that this need not be as daunting as it seems, provided that one is used to it and knows what to look for.

I have dwelt at some length on the investigation aspect because I believe that it is the single most important factor in solving our present problems. The creation of a team of the necessary size, with an adequate career structure, will involve changes in a number of Departments, including the DPP's department, the Department of Trade and Industry and the City and Metropolitan fraud squads.

We must recognise that many of the valuable recommendations in the Roskill report involve radical change, from which we must not shrink. This is where I fear that taking the juries away at the same time will make it much more difficult, and greatly increase the reluctance to implement those necessary changes.

I support the requirements for pleadings and disclosure of the defence, the requirement for the nature of the defence to be disclosed in writing after the prosecution case has also been set out in writing, and after proper legal advice, with the sanction of adverse comment by both prosecutor and judge if it is not properly done. I support the recommendations for changes in the committal proceedings procedures. There should be an opportunity, following a properly pleaded case by the prosecution, supported by sworn statements, to make a submission of no case to answer, but it should come before the trial judge at the preliminary hearings. We can consider the possibility of limited cross-examination, but I believe that the days of the long and turgid committal proceedings are past.

I support the changing of the rules of evidence so that there is a rebuttable presumption that documents, especially documents and bank books from overseas, can be treated as evidence of the truth of their contents unless the contrary is shown. These are all radical changes and they will take persuasion, as some of the careful speeches of Opposition Members have shown.

As for peremptory challenge, we should reflect for a moment. The new prosecution service is about to begin. It will give us an opportunity to study more carefully in practice how the system works. I think that we should be careful before abolishing peremptory challenge, but there might be a case for limiting its numbers in many-handed trials—trials with several defendants. I hope that we shall take the opportunity to see how it works for a year or two with the new prosecution service before we seek to make changes.

With regard to the proposal to abolish the jury in complex fraud cases, my plea is that we should stay our hand at least until we have had a chance to see how these other very proper but radical reforms, which I support, take effect. I do not believe that any hon. Member would deny that the right of jury trial for serious criminal offences is one of the fundamental constitutional rights of the British citizen. We should be extremely cautious about removing it. It is the right of the ordinary citizen, whatever his trade or calling, to be judged in serious criminal cases, not by experts, professionals and specialists, but by other ordinary citizens. They should be able to read and write, and I believe that we can overcome those problems almost within the present rules, but we should not move too rapidly to a system of judge and assessors alone.

I do not close my mind to the possibility of jury reform. We should think seriously about allowing a defendant to opt for a trial by a fraud tribunal, but before we ever think of abolishing the jury, we should first put right what we know is wrong. We should, for a period at least, put before our juries cases which have been properly investigated, have been properly prepared and are properly presented, with evidence properly admissible and summings-up properly carried out. We should then see whether the ordinary citizen, doing his duty as a juror as he sees fit, can match the standards that we are entitled to expect of him. I believe that he will. Unless he is shown to be unable to do so, we should not move any further at this stage.

9.33 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I join in the tributes that have been paid to Lord Roskill and his committee. They have laboured long and hard. We should be grateful to them and all of those who man our great and important committees.

The report is strong on conclusions but, on some issues, exceedingly short on evidence. Argument cannot be replaced by mere assertion. Running through the report is the feeling that the committee did not believe much in the jury system, but believed that it was an anomaly. I suspect that the committee got off on the wrong foot with the invitation it tendered to give evidence. It said:

"The prevalent disquiet, whether justified or not, with the present system of jury trials for what have come to be called 'serious fraud cases' is well known and has led to the setting up of the Committee."

I am not aware of any such significant disquiet, but I am aware of deep disquiet about fraud itself and ensuring that the guilty are convicted. The people one talks to may not want to change the jury system, but they think that something is wrong because in the last few years there has been an enormous growth in fraud. All is not well in the City; the City itself is anxious to clear up the matter and to restore its good name. All is not well with many of the great financial institutions. The stench keeps coming to the surface.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has mentioned the recent assessment of the Home Office that fraud losses are about £750 million a year. That has been unhappily the only growth industry in the last few years. That is what we have to face.

I welcome the broad thrust of the report. All hon. Members who have spoken will support any steps compatible with a sense of justice and fairness which would ensure that wrongdoers were brought speedily to justice. If criminals, particularly those who are now described by the new word "fraudsters", become more sophisticated, then, in the words of General Booth, "Why should the devil have all the best tunes?" I support in principle any measure to combat and prove the crime of fraud.

I read the words of the noble Lord Glenarthur in the debate in another place on Monday that the objectives were, first, justice, and, secondly, efficiency. One should not forget that justice comes first. The administration of justice should not be fragmented.

As regards investigation and prosecution, the real question is whether the Government—this applies to all Governments—have provided the resources to combat the prevalent crime of fraud or whether the Treasury gets away with its victories in saving candle ends. I welcome what the Home Secretary said tonight.

It is monstrous that the career structure of the police is such that usually it allows only three years for anyone to

[Mr. John Morris]

be part of a fraud squad, as though knowledge and expertise in that subject could be acquired on a short course. We have been told that one force is afraid to bring in another force because it would have to pay for the expertise it borrowed. That, too, is a matter of concern.

A Crown prosecuting service is being set up. Is not the real need to bring under the same roof all of the 46 or 47 organisations which have a responsibility for prosecuting fraud? Is it right that we should contemplate the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Department of Health and Social Security each having its own empire to defend? Why should not all three come under the roof of a new and enhanced Crown prosecuting service? The first step has been taken about the Fraud Investigation Group of which some of us have professional experience.

Both Lord Glenarthur and the Home Secretary announced the immediate establishment under the Chief Secretary of an examination of the need for recommendation 1 for a unified organisation. The present systems have grown like Topsy, and many of us have experience of internal Whitehall fighting. I wish the Chief Secretary well. I suspect that the genuine reason for setting up the inquiry is to have ammunition so that heads can be knocked together in the establishment of a unified service. I am not confident that in three years' time we shall have made great progress with the unified service, knowing how each empire will fight for its existence. However, it is a noble aim, and I hope that we succeed.

I welcome the proposal for more continuity of counsel and judges, and for the early employment of counsel. However, I must warn the House that we have divorced those who investigate in the police from those who are responsible for prosecuting. Therefore, although I welcome the early employment of counsel, I fear that their inclusion as part of an investigating team should be watched with care. Surely the function of counsel is to advise on evidence, to ensure that cul-de-sacs are not unnecessarily entered, and to separate the wheat from the chaff. We should not blind ourselves, unless we have ensured that counsel does not exceed that role, given what we have done and lauded regarding the generality of prosecutions.

I welcome the Lord Chancellor's reference of the difficulties in the substantive law to the Criminal Law Revision Committee. As, in practice, most serious fraud cases seem to be committed to the Crown court, I would welcome the end of committal proceedings in this area, especially if it results in the speedier bringing to trial of those charged. I am not absolutely sure whether the committee has gone the right way in rejecting a voluntary bill of indictment because whether it is done by a transfer certificate or a voluntary bill, it is important that the matter be considered judicially at some stage. I am confident that we can achieve that one way or the other, and assist in speeding up trials.

Pre-trial reviews lie at the heart both of saving money and of achieving greater efficiency. Some praise has been given to what has been done already, but I generally regard pre-trial reviews as puny. People who count in the subsequent trial do not attend, and judges are not given sufficient time to study the papers. Frequently they receive them only the night before. Unless one provides the resources, the judicial time and the financial inducement to ensure that at least some of those responsible for the subsequent trial attend, pre-trial reviews are almost a complete waste of time. I hope that the Treasury will take it to heart that if a pre-trial review is done properly, and if the resources are provided, money can be saved. I am confident of that. I find the present pre-trial reviews grotesque.

Those who draft indictments must adopt a robust approach, and limit the number of indictments, defendants and counts by severance, and the ground to be covered. When one knows that at the end of the day, whether one proves the whole area of wrongdoing, or only part of it to satisfy some of the counts, the sentence will not be substantially different, it is time for a more robust approach from those responsible for preparing cases and for skilled, experienced judges, who should be given time to prepare at the pre-trial stage, to ensure efficiency and not to lose any sense of justice. If we can get the pre-trial review right and can provide the resources then we will be well on the way towards achieving a great deal of the report's aims.

I mention quickly the rules of evidence. Here, in an age when copying documents is part and parcel of our daily lives, we should bring up to date our rules of evidence. Then I would welcome all that can be done by way of flexibility in presenting the case, whether it be oral, written, or visual aids. These are part of the ordinary scene, and juries should be given every assistance in that way.

I am concerned about the proposal with respect to the duty of the defence to disclose its case. It is difficult to see how the principle of the onus of proof remaining on the Crown can be maintained inviolate, and also the defendant's right of silence. The Crown will concentrate not on proving its case, but on demolishing the disclosed defence.

I fear also that the recommendation regarding a jury and its abolition is a stalking horse compared with the real aim of breaching the right of silence, which many have been trying to do since at least 1972, and have failed so far.

I believe that this matter is fundamental. We should not throw the baby out with the bath water, because it would mean a fundamental change in our trials, and be the first serious breach of the right of silence.

I would not lose a great deal of sleep on peremptory challenges. I fear we would develop in its place the American system of showing cause, and instead of the five minutes that are now lost on challenges we would soon have a growth industry of five days. I find it difficult to understand how this has come within the purview of the report.

It is proposed to abolish juries in complex fraud cases. The jury is the best instrument so far devised over the centuries to examine and reach a conclusion on the issue of honesty. I would prefer to be judged by 12 randomly selected persons rather than by two or three wise men conditioned by the standards of the well-heeled world from which they come. The superior courts believe that sometimes juries have difficulties and they have to spell out the definitions of dishonesty. Juries reach their conclusions on their own gut feelings.

There is not time to put all the arguments against the abolition of juries, but I shall quote Blackstone's wise words in volume four of his "Commentaries on the Laws of England". He said:

"But the founders of the English law have, with excellent forecast, contrived that no man should be called to answer for

any serious crime . . . and the truth of every accusation . . . should be confirmed by the unanimous suffrage of his equals and neighbours, indifferently chosen and superior to all suspicion. So that the liberties of England cannot but subsist so long as this palladium remains sacred and inviolate, not only from open attacks, which none will be so hardy as to make"—

he had not thought of Roskill then—

"but also from all secret machinations, which may sap and undermine it, by introducing new and arbitrary methods of trial . . . And however convenient that may appear at first, as doubtless all arbitrary powers, well executed, are the most convenient, yet let it be remembered that delays and a little inconvenience in the forms of justice are the price that all free nations must pay for their liberty in more substantial matters . . . and that though begun in trifles the precedent may gradually increase and spread to the utter disease of juries".

Blackstone was right then, and he would be right now. I hope that the Government will pause and consider.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in opening the debate that the Government were resolved to act on the recommendations of the Roskill report, but that the precise form of action would depend on a number of factors, not least what the House had to say. We have had a marvellously compact debate, in which many hon. Members have been able to give their views. We shall certainly take all those views seriously even though, in deference to the need to have as many contributions as possible, I shall not be able to answer all the points.

We are agreed on two things. First, fraud is a serious matter about which more must be done. If one needed any proof, that will be provided in a study soon to be published which was partly funded by the Home Office and carried out by Dr. Levi at University college, Cardiff. It reveals, among a number of interesting points, that since 1980 recorded commercial fraud has increased by an average of 5 per cent. annually and that commercial fraud reported to the London fraud squad represents almost three times the total cost of all property crime in London, and in 1984 accounted for £687 million.

Secondly, I think we are all agreed that the Roskill report is a major achievement and should be acted upon. The Government are resolved to do that. Inevitably, although what happens in court is not the only element —nor necessarily the most important element—in Lord Roskill's report, most attention has focused on what happens in court in fraud trials. I shall therefore consider that aspect.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) that what Roskill proposed was nothing less than a fundamental overhaul of courtroom procedure. That is certainly right and welcome. I am glad that most of the committee's detailed recommendations to improve and speed up our trial system commend themselves to both sides of the House.

Inevitably, controversy has centred on two proposals: first, the fraud trial tribunal; and, secondly, the pre-trial review procedure. I shall deal with the second proposal first. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle), in what I think I can say with the assent of the House was a typically wise speech, said that our present pre-trial procedure needed firming up. Other hon. Members, especially those with experience of the courts, pointed out that the pre-trial review procedure, which has no statutory basis, is treated as a warm-up in which understudies participate and is not taken to be as serious an element in the trial as Lord Roskill, as most hon. Members who have spoken, and as the judges, think it should be.

In a recent judgment in the case of Hutchinson, Lord Justice Watkins said:

"The review"—

meaning, of course, the pre-trial review—

"is now in common usage and has proved to be, when properly conducted, and when prosecution and defence co-operate to the maximum expectation, of great assistance to the court and to the administration. It assists in highlighting the issues involved in a trial and has the effect quite often of shortening the length of it. But it does not have the force of law. It is not recognised by statute or regulation . . . Many judges and practitioners would welcome the review having the force of law."

Those sentiments have been reinforced tonight.

Some hon. Members have spoken against the recommendations, including Opposition Front Bench spokesmen and the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). However, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South pointed out, the alibi notice provides that a defendant is obliged to serve notice of an alibi on the prosecution. If he does not do so, the alibi may not normally be admitted at the trial. Furthermore, even if, relying on the right to silence, a defendant declines to give evidence, he has to put his case to prosecution witnesses.

All that is being said for the pre-trial review is that the defendant should put his case at an earlier stage, but after the prosecution has disclosed its case to him. Under section 81 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the defence must also give advance notice of the substance of expert evidence. Those who dissent from this proposition cannot have it both ways. By all means be opposed to the fraud trial tribunal and to the removal of juries from serious fraud cases, but if juries are to be retained in complicated fraud cases, let us at least do the maximum that we possibly can to ensure that the issues are capable of being put clearly and of being understood.

The way that this can best be achieved is by having a proper pre-trial review, when what can be agreed is agreed and put out of the way, and when what cannot be agreed is clearly understood, so that the prosecution can make the statement that Lord Roskill recommends. Then everybody will know where he is. If the purpose of juries is to determine honesty, they must be given a fair chance to do so by having the issues put squarely before them.

I do not wish to satirise the Opposition Front Bench, but if their agreement with Roskill comes down only to the easy bits concerning more secretarial facilities for judges, that is a cop-out. If the Opposition oppose the fraud trial tribunal, they must say clearly what they mean. We must improve the procedure in fraud cases so that the major and farsighted reform of the law of evidence proposed by Roskill can be implemented. It will then be easier to reject the fraud trial tribunal option.

The Government have an open mind; no decision has been taken. However, it is interesting to note that, after my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary had invited the House to give its opinion, 12 good men and true delivered their verdict on the fraud trial tribunal. Although there may have been equivocation — unusual for him — in the advice given by my hon. and learned Friend for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), they delivered a majority verdict of 11 to 1 against the fraud trial tribunal. Even if that jury was heavily vetted in favour of paid-up members of the

[Mr. David Mellor]

lawyers' trade union, nevertheless the message was clear. I appreciated the Welsh eloquence of the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) who defended juries. He reminded me of that other great Welsh lawyer, Lord Elwyn-Jones, in whose chambers I began my unprepossessing legal career. When he was called upon to explain the number of acquittals in Wales he said, "Well, Welsh juries are against crime, but they are not dogmatic about it."

Most of the attention has been focused upon what happens in court, but I suspect that a great deal of the real interest lies in what happens before one reaches court. Therefore, we must ensure that we get better at finding out when fraud is taking place. That is not easy, because, by its nature, fraud is covert. When we investigate fraud, we must ensure that arrangements are made that will have the maximum chance of identifying the evidence, and that it is possible to sift through it in such a way that a case can be brought to bear against malefactors. It is not without note, therefore, that Roskill made major recommendations about a unified organisation. Those recommendations have serious implications, not least because, as the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon reminded us, the House has taken steps to separate investigation from prosecution. Any backtracking will require serious consideration. Indeed, these questions will be thoroughly considered by a committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

We fully acknowledge that more resources are needed. One hundred and ninety five new posts at the Department of Trade and Industry have been created. There are more accountants for the fraud investigation group, which is itself new. We take Roskill seriously, as the House will soon see.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Unemployment (Doncaster)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

10 pm

Mr. Michael Welsh (Doncaster, North): The subject I am raising in the Adjournment debate is the unemployment problem in Doncaster metropolitan borough area following the closure of Youngs Seafoods and other undertakings. Before I start, may I welcome the new Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Front Bench? I hope that he enjoys it. They do say, I do not know if it is true, that success comes to Ministers who take cognisance of the people who move Adjournment debates and try to help them.

Unemployment is not new to me. The pit I worked at was closed about 16 years ago and only last year the workshops in my own village were closed, with 400 young people put out of work. Both of those were profitable. It seems strange that we close profitable undertakings in south Yorkshire, but that is what happened.

In tonight's debate I should like to speak about different issues from those of my own village. There are two particular areas in my constituency which cause me great and special concern—the mining community of Askern and the township of Thorne. I understand that the employment statistics are not readily available for those communities, and I accept that. Even if they were, they would not reveal the hard facts of those who suffer the indignity of unemployment. However, what is on record is the appalling level of unemployment in the Doncaster travel-to-work area of which those two communities are a part. In that area there are more than 20,500 people unemployed and, unfortunately, the local job centres have only 238 vacancies advertised. At the same time, the skillcentre in Doncaster has been closed. When you were a Minister, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you had the privilege of opening it. They have closed that, so we cannot even have trades people in Doncaster, which is a great pity. Fifty jobs were advertised at the Queensgate job centre and 500 people turned up for those jobs. There were not enough forms for them to fill in. Not only that, but the jobs were only for 13 hours a week, part time. Therefore, one can see the problem in Doncaster and that the people there want the opportunity to work but find it very difficult to obtain it. In Thorne the local authorities tried to get the exact figure of unemployment. It has been put as high as 50 per cent. in that small township. That is deplorable.

Before coal reserves were discovered in the south Yorkshire mining village of Askern, its claim to fame was the mineral springs from which people believed they could receive a cure or treatment for their ailments. What we need is treatment for the ailment of unemployment. The local colliery has been saved from closure, and we all hope that it will have a long and secure future. Next door to the colliery is the Coalite and Chemical Company Limited. It has a processing plant which produces chemical by-products from coal and the smokeless fuel known as coalite. Because the company owns other plants similar to Askern, it has decided to close that plant. This means a loss of 300 jobs in a small mining village.

The reason given for the closure is that demand for the product has fallen off considerably. This is yet another spin-off from the hard-line attitude taken by the Government towards local authority expenditure. One of

the casualties of local authority programmes has been the creation of smokeless zones. I am told that the declaration of smokeless zones has been delayed to the point where the United Kingdom's poor rate of progress has attracted adverse comments from our friends in the EEC.

Because coalite is an excellent smokeless fuel, the plant would have a secure future if smokeless zones were fully implemented. All must recognise and realise the sheer impracticability of piped gas to all households in the United Kingdom. Askern needs help quickly or the village will have only the colliery to depend on.

The colliery of Thorne closed in the 1950s, and in the 1970s the NCB invested in the colliery to bring it into production again. Will the Minister persuade the Minister of State, Department of Energy to pursue the opening of the colliery as soon as possible? It will take 10 years to open the colliery, because a new shaft must be sunk. I am pleased to hear that the coal board has remained firm on its commitment to open the Thorne colliery, but I ask that a formal assurance is given that the colliery will open, and open as soon as possible.

The county and borough councils persuaded the Development Commission that the problem of Thorne warranted the township being designated as a rural development area. I am pleased to be associated with that initiative and grateful for the opportunities that the designation can offer. However, there will be no overnight miracle from the designation of Thorne.

Last year, the people of Thorne brought themselves together in a wonderful example of self-help and determination to try to resist the decline in their economy. At one time, a major employer in the area was GEC, but its factory lies empty, another victim of the folly of allowing the imports of consumer durables from the far east. Lord Weinstock of the GEC was so impressed by the people's determination that he met the expense of opening the factory for a short period, so that it could be used as the basis for a publicity campaign to encourage industrial development and investment in Thorne. Although the campaign did not produce any miracles, it sowed the seeds of optimism to such an extent that the community will try again this year, to see whether it can get industry in Thorne.

What they must feel now is beyond my understanding. A few days ago, there was the loss of 200 more jobs, when Young's Seafoods Ltd. decided to close its food fatory. The Thorne community cannot take much more of this. People there have a positive attitude towards work. Industrial relations are not a problem, environmental conditions are pleasant, the motorway network is superb and we have none of the problems associated with the M25 in the south-east. Traffic moves easily to the east coast ports, to the west, south and north. Thorne needs help now.

The Doncaster local authority has been classed by a leading newspaper as a Labour-controlled council in the hands of good progressive thinkers. That is right. It does not practise extreme policies and it is concerned to improve the quality of life. Thorne is part of the Doncaster metropolitan borough, which has a population of 300,000.

Hon. Members may ask why the unemployed of Thorne do not travel to work in Doncaster and the short answer is that the unemployment figure for the Doncaster travel to work area reached the disastrous level of 21·1 per cent. in January. Now, there is a major threat to employment prospects as British Rail Engineering Ltd. in Doncaster, Central constituency, which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, represent has come up with a reorganisation plan, and the Confedertion of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions said that the BR board:

"were unable to offer any statistical evidence to justify their proposals, nor could they provide any information as to how their proposals would affect jobs."

That relates to British Rail's decision on the organisation of British Rail's works and plants at Doncaster. It would be a disaster of the first order. The unions have considered the plans and they estimate that of the 3,000 people who work there, more than 1,500 would be made redundant if the plans were accepted. That cannot be allowed to take place. The plant has been in the forefront of engine building. It has built some of the great engines of our time and the workers have the skills needed to build engines.

I ask the Minister to consider the issue and not to allow the rape of industry in Doncaster to take place. My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Mr. Walker) has already been in touch with the chairman of British Rail and we are hoping for an early meeting with him.

I condemn British Rail's invitation to foreign companies to tender for £1·5 billion worth of diesel and electric locomotives that could be built in Doncaster. Doncaster is capable of building them and it is only right that they should be built there. I ask the Minister to give whatever help he can.

Youth unemployment in Doncaster is as bad as in the third world countries. Only 10 per cent. of young people coming out of school find employment. The under-achievers in the education system are currently provided for by training workshops operated by the council under the youth training scheme. I ask the Minister if it is possible for the scheme at Thorne to continue. Personally, I am pessimistic about the matter. I realise that the Minister will not be able to tell me this evening if the Manpower Services Commission can continue with the scheme, but perhaps he will write to me.

The Government continue to limit the contributions of local councils to economic regeneration. They are trying to ensure that, excluding the run-up to parliamentary elections, local authorities will be starved of resources and denied access to their funds of capital, which could reduce unemployment and improve the infrastructure. When the upturn in the economy comes, that will be needed to get Britain off the ground.

South Yorkshire council has worked hard. It has helped with factories and factory units being created in Thorne, but we must try to get people into them. This is not the occasion to debate the demerits of the Government's economic strategy. Those who wrote it and who are ensuring its implementation cannot be blinded by the appalling human problems in my constituency. The Government are the servant of the public, and Members of Parliament are here to serve. We have no right to inflict hardship, distress and despair. I hope that the Minister will give an undertaking to carry out an urgent inquiry into the issues that I have raised. The Government must use all available resources to stop the rot and to improve job prospects, which would provide hope for the future of our industries.

The Government are a major employer. I hope that they will take account of constituencies such as Doncaster, North when they are identifying areas of location and relocation for Government enterprises and administration.

[Mr. Michael Welsh]

I hope that the Government's initiative will not be confined to the statement that a few jobs have been provided at the new prison at Lindholme. However much those jobs are needed, they do little to ease the distress or to give hope for the future. The people of Doncaster want the right to work. It is up to the Minister and the Government to ensure that right.

10.14 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Welsh) for allowing me to participate in this Adjournment debate. I also thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Minister.

I intend to say three nasty words to the Minister. They are "long-term planning". I thought I saw the Minister cringe when he heard those words. I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for using those blasphemous words in the Chamber, but long-term planning has not been practised by the Government since 1979. In West Germany, when new technology is proposed to be introduced into a company which would make men redundant, discussions take place on where that manpower will go to after the technology has been introduced. With planning, no one is thrown onto the scrapheap.

When the Government came to power, they lifted exchange controls and allowed money to flow abroad to create manufacturing jobs at the expense of jobs in Britain. Had that investment been made in our manufacturing base, we would not be in this decline. The entire Doncaster area has been hit extremely hard by the Government's policies, especially Don Valley. The Mexborough and Conisbrough area has an official unemployment rate of 23 per cent. It would be higher but for the Government's manipulation to mask the true figures. In 1985, of 520 school leavers, only 65 found jobs: 370 are in temporary employment; and 70 will become unemployed at the end of their YTS courses.

The Don Valley is a coal field community in change. The future for coal is uncertain. The pre-strike manpower for the south Yorkshire coalfield was 28,000. The projected figure for March 1986 is 18,000 men. I see that the Under-Secretary of State for Energy is in the Chamber to hear the debate. Yorkshire Main colliery closed with the loss of 1,200 jobs. That pit, which had 20 years' reserve of coal, was shut because one man—the area director—decided it. Cadeby pit now employs only 350 men and, unless the NCB agrees to invest in new seams, it will close. Manvers pit now employs only 820 men, and will close unless it receives investment.

I could give many more figures for my area and for Doncaster, but I hope that I have already shown the terrible consequences of the National Coal Board's policy. NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. is operating in the Doncaster area and has processed 16 loans for a total of £155,000, which has created 61 jobs. But there have been no loans for the Mexborough and Conisbrough areas. The latest regional development grant figures from the Department of Trade and Industry show that of the £1,738,000 grant for Yorkshire and Humberside, only £45,000 will go to the Don Valley.

In your constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, British Rail has threatened to close its engineering plant, which has been famous for more than a century, and has been a byword for quality of work. The Flying Scotsman and other engines are fine examples of that quality. About five years ago, the men and management at the plant agreed to make changes in the work practices which British Rail wanted. The estimated profit for the fiscal year 1985-86 is £2,262,000. Yet under BR or BREL they are under a cloud with a job loss of between 1,500 and 2,300. They do not want charity, only the right to work and to compete. They are confident that they can take on all comers, given the chance.

Case International promised 2,000 extra jobs at its factory, but that has yet to be developed. English Estates is helping with its small starter units policy. No one area of help is needed rather help is needed in every area.

The Minister should take note of the following points. First, he should consider motorway provision which would open up the Dearne area to industrialists. Secondly, an increase is needed in the urban programme allocations for community and industrial projects. Doncaster currently receives £320,000 for the whole borough which includes the Conisborough and Mexborough area. That £320,000 comes from the Department of the Environment for urban industrial development, but more money is needed. Thirdly, the Minister should be aware of the need to increase the derelict land allocations. Fourthly, there must be special help from the Invest in Britain bureau, and the regional Department of Trade and Industry to encourage new growth industries into the area. Fifthly, there must be more houses. The lifting of the restrictions on capital receipts would help. Doncaster council is currently exploring joint projects with the private sector. Sixth, there should be tourist grants to exploit Conisborough castle. Seventhly, there should be more Manpower Services Commission assistance to develop further training workshops and for an information centre for new business. Finally, there should be the removal of the moratorium on English Estates to enable the next phase of its development on the Denaby industrial estate to commence.

The Department of Employment is sending out inquiries directly to the council, as the county council will no longer exist. I ask the Minister that they be sent out only to development areas. The desperate situation that I have briefly outlined shows that if there is to be any improvement in the morale and in the employment situation in Mexborough and Doncaster all the points I have mentioned must be considered and action must be taken quickly before there is further deterioration.

I ask the Minister to galvanise the various Departments to ensure that collectively help can be forthcoming. We have the manpower and the skills. Please give us the opportunity for those skills to be used in the Doncaster area.

10.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Ian Lang): I begin by thanking the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Welsh) for his kind welcome to me on this my first appearance at the Dispatch Box and I take careful note of the advice that he gave.

I welcome the opportunity afforded by this Adjournment debate to deal with the serious issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I fully appreciate his sincere concern over the problems that many of his constituents face. I shall try to answer as many of his points as possible in the time available. It was also interesting to have the contribution from the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr.

Redmond). I note that the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has been present throughout the debate. It is particularly appropriate that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the right hon. Member for Doncaster, Central, should have consented to take the Chair.

Unemployment is not just a local or even a national problem but one faced by most of the industrialised world. There are, however, parts of the country that have been particularly badly hit by market conditions and the consequent need for structural change. Employment in the Doncaster area has been dependent traditionally on a few big manufacturing employers. There have been a number of plant closures and contractions in recent years, particularly in mining and engineering. Doncaster is not unique in this respect but that, of course, is no comfort to those affected.

The hon. Member for Doncaster, North particularly mentioned the announcement of the closure of the Youngs Seafoods factory at Thorne. I understand that the reason for this was increasing production costs and the effect of stiff competition. The loss of 190 jobs is very regrettable, but that decision is and must be a matter for the commercial judgment of the company. We would be deceiving the workforce if we pretended otherwise. I understand that work will be transferred to the Grimsby plant and the cold storage depot at Thorne will, in fact, be retained and expanded. It remains true that the frozen food industry in general is doing well with a steadily growing volume of sales.

Doncaster has traditionally been a railway town and British Rail Engineering has been a major source of employment. The BR board has been seeking to reorganise BREL into a more efficient, independent company with two distinct business groups with Doncaster as part of the maintenance group. BR is still working out the detailed implications of the new policies. I know that in seeking cost-effective use of its assets it will take full account of the expertise and facilities at Doncaster. BR has already announced that its new national store will be based at Doncaster.

I welcome the presence of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Energy. I know that there has been a significant reduction in job opportunities in the area. The NCB of course maintain its policy of ensuring that there is a job for every man who wishes to remain in the industry. Also, under a £10 million contract signed in May last year the Skillcentre Training Agency agrees to provide training for people leaving the mining industry under the NCB's voluntary redundancy arrangements. The agency provides work assessment, occupational training and training for self employment to meet individual and market needs. I understand that there are no further closures under consideration in south Yorkshire at present and, with production records being broken every week, there is a healthy future for the coal industry.

Doncaster has clearly been through a hard period of readjustment, as the traditional sources of employment have been contracting. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that there are no grounds for optimism. It is never easy to adjust to major shifts in market conditions, but Doncaster has a number of factors going for it. It is a fact of life that the service sector is becoming a more and more important generator of employment. Doncaster is a retailing centre with a large catchment area. Sainsbury's opened its first northern store in Doncaster and Hillards plans to open a new superstore in Doncaster which could create up to 250 jobs. The first phase of a £22 million leisure centre at Doncaster airfield is due to start in March. Facilities will include a £14 million water sports centre and a hotel and shopping centre. Such a major enterprise is bound to attract jobs and have a knock-on effect in attracting firms to the area. Doncaster has good communications—it is one and a half hours from London by train and within easy motorway driving distance of the Humberside ports as well being alongside the A1 and close to the M1. The countryside around Doncaster is varied and attractive ranging from Forestry Commission plantations in the south to the flatlands in the east. There is real potential for tourism here—not yet exploited — with such attractions as the improved south Yorkshire canal and Conisbrough castle. I am glad to see that Doncaster local authority is working hard to sell the area's undoubted advantages.

Although there are those encouraging signs, I fully accept that a great deal more needs to be done to bring about a turn round in Doncaster's fortunes. Of course, the Government must play their part. The whole of the local authority area has assisted area status with Rotherham and Mexborough having development area status, thus attracting the highest levels of regional aid, receiving over £8 million by way of regional development grants since 1979. For the Doncaster and Rotherham and Mexborough assisted areas as a whole, regional assistance has helped create over 5,000 jobs and safeguarded over 4,500 existing ones.

The assistance is now focused directly on job creation, rather than on encouraging capital-intensive investment by firms which would not significantly expand employment. Also, since last November, some service sector activities are eligible for regional aid for the first time. All this I believe shows the Government's practical concern to help those areas which have been hardest hit by unemployment to adapt to structural change, new markets and to attract investment there.

Enthusiasm and hard work are essential for enterprise to succeed. Sound advice is also needed and so is training. The Government's adult training strategy and their youth training scheme have an important role to play. The extension of the YTS to two years from April represents a major step towards ensuring that all young people under 18 are either in jobs, in full-time education or undertaking high quality training.

As well as young people, we are particularly concerned about the problems of the long-term unemployed, in Doncaster as elsewhere. The community programme—our major scheme to help the long-term unemployed—has been expanded by 100,000 places nationally this year, with an increase in places in the metropolitan district of Doncaster to 2,407, double the figure for last year.

There are many ways in which the Government are giving support and encouragement to the Doncaster area in meeting the challenges it continues to face. Doncaster has high unemployment and declining traditional industries. It also has a great deal of potential for revival and expansion. Regional aid and employment and training measures represent a firm Government commitment to the future of the area. That commitment, together with the efforts of the people of Doncaster

[Mr. Ian Lang]

themselves, is beginning to pay off. There is still much to do to adapt successfully to change and I hope that the people of Doncaster will agree that we have done a great deal to help.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 14 February 1986

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Surcharge and Disqualification of Councillors (Abolition) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House will be aware that when an hon. Member is successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills he is inundated with letters from various organisations seeking his support for what they consider to be important issues. Hon. Members have to consider those approaches. Like any other hon. Member, I am grateful for the opportunity to present a Bill. The 35 or so organisations which wrote to me had commendable arguments and supportable ideas, but I had to reflect on whether it was possible in the present climate, and with the present Government, to introduce any progressive Bill that would stand a chance of gaining the support of Conservative Members.

Since 1979 the Government have conducted a relentless campaign against the living standards of millions of working-class people and their rights and liberties which have been won in struggles over 200 years. We have experienced the highest levels of unemployment ever recorded, and attacks on trade union rights. There have also been attacks on local democracy, which is the reason for the Bill.

The metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council are being abolished without the electorate being given a chance to decide. The National Health Service has been eroded, and social progress in many other areas has been halted. We have witnessed the greatest industrial unrest and the longest and bitterest strike since the war. We have had riots on the streets of our major cities for perhaps the first time this century. There has been a massive increase in drug abuse. Most recently, we have witnessed the erection of a "Berlin wall" in London at Wapping. The design of that wall, the barbed wire and the trenches, are no less of a barrier to freedom than the wall in Berlin. It is keeping the freedom of trade unionists out of the building, and that is the intention. That is the Britain which the present Government, especially the Prime Minister, have created.

In those circumstances, what kind of Bill can an hon. Member present to resolve the problems that face the unemployed and local authorities? What can he do to help local authorities? High unemployment puts greater demands on local authorities' resources, yet they are faced with further expenditure cuts and constraints on their activities. Today, two councils are before the courts for daring to attempt to meet the needs of the people whom they represent. That is a sad situation, and it is why I am introducing the Bill today.

The Bill is an attempt to show the Conservative party that we in the Labour party will continue to use the time accorded to us in the House to raise questions about the liberty, freedom and rights of people which the Government are taking away. It seeks to remove the threat to local authorities of financial penalties and disqualification from office. The present system undoubtedly hinders policy making, encourages excessive recourse to legal opinion, and is a personal threat to members of local authorities. Evidence of that is seen by the fact that councillors are now before the courts in London. The system allows far too much power to be wielded arbitrarily by an unelected official, the district auditor, against elected councillors, who obviously have a far wider interest and remit than has the auditor.

That anomaly is a hang-over from Victorian legislation. We know how the Prime Minister holds Victorian values in high esteem, but our working class experienced nothing but misery during the Victorian period. The best thing about it is that it has passed. However, the Prime Minister undoubtedly intends to rehearse those values which brought misery and deprivation to millions of working-class people, if the opportunity occurs.

Surcharge and disqualification legislation goes back to 1834, when the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 introduced the infamous new poor law. It introduced the right for Government auditors to disallow items of expenditure and to order the guardians to repay the amount. The law was extended during the 19th century and came to include elected councillors in the reformed local government councils. It has been the cause of some notorious court cases this century, of which the Poplar case in the 1920s is one of the most famous.

When the Poplar council had the audacity to pay its labour force in excess of union rates in May 1923, the district auditor threatened to surcharge the councillors to the tune of £17,000 for the year ending March 1922. The case involved George Lansbury, and it has been dubbed the "councillors' revolt" by at least one historian. The Poplar councillors believed that they were acting within the law, which at the time was the Metropolis Management Act 1855. They argued that section 52 of that Act empowered the council to pay employees as it thought fit. The auditor disagreed, and, under pressure from the local business interests, decided to enforce a surcharge on councillors.

The Poplar councillors' actions created a watershed in the history of the labour movement, of which many of us are proud. They acted in the best traditions of the labour movement. Despite their private anxieties, they were able and willing to risk their privileges and freedom to fight for working people. The two councils before the courts today are doing no less than the Poplar council did in the 1920s, and they should be gaining the support of our movement, just as the Poplar council did.

The Poplar case has many parallels with more recent cases. It showed the power of the district auditor over elected councillors. At the time of the Poplar case Mr. Greenwood said:

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

"In the past we took no objection to the institution of the district auditor, but now the district auditor's powers appear to have grown far beyond what are considered to be reasonable. I do not need to trace the history of the growth of the area covered by the district auditors, but since they were established nearly a century ago . . . they have gradually extended their duties to cover the accounts of all local authorities except municipal boroughs and county boroughs outside London . . . As the powers now stand, the district auditor is not merely the guardian of the law; he is becoming, as a matter of fact, the arbiter of social policy. That puts him in an entirely different position, and I say that, whatever may be the qualifications of the district auditor to decide questions of legality, he is the very last person in the world to decide whether expenditure is reasonable or unreasonable. If he is a really good dyed-in-the-wool member of the Tory party, almost all forms of public expenditure would be regarded by him as unreasonable."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 1927; Vol. 207, c. 1037-38.]

Today there is no difference in the role of the auditor, because he exists to act politically for the Government in the courts.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Loyden: I shall not give way.

More recently we have seen the case of the 11 councillors from Clay Cross, and my hon. Friend, the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will elaborate on it. They were surcharged in 1973 for refusing to implement the Housing Finance Act 1972, and we know the consequences of that for councillors in Bolsover.

The principle of surcharge and disqualification has not been abandoned by the Government, although its demise is long overdue. Indeed, it has been built into the Local Government Finance Act 1982. The provisions for surcharge and disqualification are contained in sections 19 and 20. Section 19 deals with the powers of the auditor and the courts in relation to items of account which are contrary to law. Section 20 relates to the failure to bring sums to account and to losses due to wilful misconduct. It repeats, with minor changes, the provisions of section 161 of the Local Government Act 1972.

A district auditor who considers an item to be contrary to law may apply to the courts for a declaration to that effect, unless the item is sanctioned by the Secretary of State. Where a court makes such a declaration, it may order repayment by those responsible, and disqualify members from office if the amount is more than £2,000. In addition, the auditor may certify that sums lost, due to wilful misconduct and failure to bring sums to account, must be repaid by the people responsible. A member from whom a sum of more than £2,000 is certified as being due is automatically disqualified from local authority membership for five years.

Sections 19 and 20 empower an official to act against councillors where he, or she, considers that a council has acted outside the law or with wilful misconduct. The Act is so formed that, as in the Poplar case, councils are held to be guilty until they prove themselves innocent. We have always accepted that one of the tenets of British justice is that a person is innocent until proven guilty. The auditor's action assumes people to be guilty before they have appeared before a court. The responsibility rests upon them to prove their innocence. That is counter to natural justice, and it is something of which the House should be ashamed.

An official with no local accountability, appointed by central Government and acting behind a veil of secrecy, for which this Government are famous, has the right to throw a local authority into chaos, threaten councillors with personal financial disaster and spark off months of wasteful and expensive litigation, the outcome of which does not benefit a soul.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Sterling): Will the hon. Gentleman give way——

Mr. Loyden: That is an absurdity and an irrelevance to the needs of local government in 1980.

Mr. Forsyth *rose*——

Mr. Loyden: I assure the hon. Gentleman that he will have plenty of time to speak if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Bill is not a publicity gimmick. It is an attempt to set local government on a more reasonable legal basis whereby policy making and its implementation can be carried out without a threat constantly hanging over local authorities.

The Bill is limited to amending those parts of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 that deal with surcharging and disqualification. In addition, two sections of the Local Government Act 1985, which apply a similar system to members of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils, are amended by the Bill.

Section 19 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 is amended by the Bill. Under that Act the auditor may ask the court to declare an item of expenditure illegal, and the court may or may not refuse to make such a declaration. However, under the Act as amended the court would not be able to order repayment of the expenditure that had been declared unlawful. The court would be unable to order that the councillor be disqualified from being a member of a local authority for a specified period.

At present, section 19 empowers the court to order payment by the council under audit of the auditor's expenses. That is ironic. A council found guilty by the auditor must meet its own expenses and defend itself in the courts, and at the same time pay the auditor's bill for legal representation.

Section 19 is the most odious of all the sections. In line with the Victorian example that I gave earlier, it assumes that any person who is certified is guilty until proven innocent. Any person certified for a sum of more than £2,000 is automatically disqualified for five years. The consequences of section 19 for policy making and local government are devastating. At present, Lambeth and Liverpool councillors are under threat of surcharging and disqualification. Councillors in other authorities are also under threat, because they may be surcharged on a future date for decisions which they have taken in good faith.

It is not an exaggeration to say that councils today are less inclined to carry out promises that they have given to the electorate, not because they are unwilling, but because they stand in fear of the actions of the auditor and the courts. The sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of elected representatives is a shame and a scandal. The Government should reconsider how they are treating decent men and women and decent trade unionists by making criminals of them.

It is uncertain whether other members will be surcharged. That is also at the discretion of the auditor.

There have been examples of authorities, when dealing with minor matters such as school meals, having to consider carefully whether they can lower the cost of school meals to ease the pressure on families in areas of mass unemployment. Before they can do so they must seek legal advice, because they could be in breach of the law according to the auditor's interpretation of it.

How can we expect local authorities to respond to the needs of the people they represent if they are in constant fear of being surcharged and disqualified, and when their lives and the lives of their families can be affected or even ruined for a decade to come? Under those circumstances, how can we expect local authority representatives to act properly in the interests of the people they represent? The Government have placed so many restraints on local authorities that they are incapable of carrying out their responsibilities.

I became a member of Liverpool city council in 1960, so I know something about local government. During the 1960s and the 1970s enormous housing problems arose in Liverpool, not only with slum housing, but with housing built in the post-war period. That period created the concrete jungles. I do not necessarily blame the Conservative party for that, but local government was influenced to build in that way because the subsidies from central Government were higher. The policy was ill considered and ill conceived. We have a legacy of properties that are inadequate for habitation, especially for parents bringing up families.

Those problems have been with us in Liverpool since the war. They were not tackled until the Labour council was elected in 1983. There is not a sign of a Liberal or an SDP Member in the Chamber today. During the Liberal administration, in cohorts with the Tories, in Liverpool, not one brick was laid for public sector housing for four years. The Liberals' budget strategy meant that when the Government introduced penalties, the budgets were pitched so low that it became a permanent problem for Liverpool to carry out enormous tasks in education and housing, and in improving the environment.

The Labour council started building houses and creating employment for people in the building industry, and in this it had the full support of the building employers, who recognised the worthy cause behind the council's decision to build houses in the city. In the most impoverished, older areas of Liverpool, the council dared to build sports centres for the youngsters. Conservative Members constantly shed crocodile tears about young people, and we all recognise that youngsters need a place where they can go for recreation instead of being driven into the hands of the drug pushers, yet the fact that Liverpool city council decided to build sports centres in areas where they were needed was cited as one of the criminal offences committed by the councillors. The same was true of the council's housing programme, although it was simply trying to shorten the housing waiting list of between 12,000 and 16,000.

The actions of the city councillors in responding honestly to the needs of the people who elected them have led them into the courts. The Government's intention was not to root out real criminals. There are plenty of opportunities to take action against councillors who are acting illegally, either through civil or criminal proceedings, so there is no need for the legislation that I am seeking to amend. It is there simply to act as a frightener to restrict councillors from doing what they were elected to do. It is not only a scandal and a shame, but it tramples on local authority democracy. We should not tolerate it.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment on our Front Bench today, associating himself with the demands being made for a repeal of the legislation so that councillors can regain their right to operate in the way that we believe they should.

My right hon. and hon. Friends will expand on the case during the morning. We have a responsibility to bring to the attention of the House, as I have tried to do, issues that will be relevant to the people outside. When they become more aware of the devastation that has been caused by the Government since 1979, of the way in which the wheels of progress have been turned back and of how democracy is being trampled on and destroyed, they will come to the conclusion that the only answer is to get rid of the Government. We must ensure that the Conservative party is relegated to the dustbin of history. We must also remove from the minds of the British people any doubts that a Labour Government will repair the damage that has been done by the Government and will reinstate the rights that have been removed from the British people. That will give us a Britain that is peaceful, prosperous and moving towards socialism.

10.3 am

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) said that he was a member of Liverpool council during the 1960s and into the 1970s. I, too, was in local government in the 1960s and early 1970s, and it was a very different form of local government from the one that has grown up in some areas today. Although councils were divided into parties and we fought elections with some fervour, there was a tremendous amount of agreement in running the council. There was also a built-in acceptance of the responsibility of local councillors to act reasonably. The rates and the way in which they were set did not vary enormously—although some of the priorities varied — almost irrespective of party.

Recently, some councils have spent money as they wished, irrespective of what the Government said. Therefore, measures had to be introduced to restrict that spending, which were accompanied by penalties to be used against people who abuse the law.

Despite the hon. Gentleman's claims about the auditor and the alleged unfairness of the present legislation, section 19(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 states:

> "The court shall not make an order under subsection (2)(*a*) . . . if the court is satisfied that the person responsible for incurring or authorising any such expenditure acted reasonably or in the belief that the expenditure was authorised by law, and in any other case shall have regard to all circumstances, including that person's means and ability to repay that expenditure or any part of it."

Therefore, if the councillors believed their actions to be lawful, they could not be charged. We are being asked to remove sanctions against those who are prepared to flout the law.

The laws of the land are made in this House, not in local government. Those who serve in local government may not like the law of the land, but they must obey it.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Has it occurred to the hon. Gentleman that if the Bill is passed, the law will be

[Mr. Tony Benn]

changed? The purpose of the Bill is to change the law so that councillors acting responsibly will not be in breach of the law. Has it occurred to him that he is not in a council chamber, but in the Chamber of the House of Commons, where the law is made?

Mr. Stevens: I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point. The Bill requires a change in the law. However, some councillors have ignored laws that have already been passed, for which there can be no excuse.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill proposes the removal of penalties on those councillors who behave unlawfully? Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman's analogy is false.

Mr. Stevens: My hon. Friend is right. The Bill wishes to remove penalties on those who try to take on the law. If people wish to take on the law and become martyrs, that is a matter for them.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Is it not true that the only person in the House who has broken the law recently is the Secretary of State for Transport, who has twice been found by a court to have acted unreasonably and unlawfully?

Mr. Stevens: It is for the courts to make that decision. We also have penalties in law, which should be retained. People should not be allowed to take upon themselves decisions to spend money in ways which the law does not permit. Local councillors should not be allowed to take powers beyond those provided to them in law merely because they believe that they need to spend that money in their areas.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that one needs go back only a few years to see cases — Tameside, Congreve and Laker Airways are examples—in which a Labour Government committed a series of unlawful acts?

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the difference between a councillor and a Secretary of State acting on behalf of the Government is that the latter believes that what he is doing is lawful? In this case, the councillors could not claim that they were acting within the law because they made a virtue of acting outwith the law.

Mr. Stevens: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Those who wish to act outside the law are penalised by the law. That is how it should stay.

I have a great affection for Liverpool because I was a student there. I know that the city has problems. As the hon. Gentleman said, it had problems in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. But it is still necessary for those who run any city or town in Britain to act within the law, and that law should not be challenged.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I shall do a deal with the hon. Gentleman. I shall have a word with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and see whether he will alter the Bill removing the surcharge from councillors but impose that system which now applies to councillors on Members of Parliament and Ministers. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the system of surcharges and checks on public expenditure for people in public places is good, will he introduce a private Member's Bill to impose the same system on Governments of any colour and Members of Parliament? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if Members of Parliament had their expenses scrutinised in the way that councillors do there would not be many left in the Chamber?

Mr. Stevens: I hope that that is not a fair comment about hon. Members. My luck in private Members' ballots is such that I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's offer.

Mr. Bill Walker: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to suggest that hon. Members are behaving in a manner that is dishonourable?

Mr. Allan Roberts: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Let me deal with the point of order first. I have heard nothing so far that is out of order.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not say that hon. Members act dishonourably. The system whereby——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House heard what the hon. Gentleman said, as I did, and I have said that I have heard nothing so far that is out of order.

Mr. Stevens: Local government in Britain has a fair amount of discretion and money can be spent on a wide range of areas within the law. It is generally accepted in Britain by councillors of all political persuasions that they must act reasonably on behalf of their electorate within the law and not take on the Government of the day in pursuit of their own ideas. It makes no difference whether councillors act illegally once in power or whether they are elected as a result of promising to do something that is illegal; their actions will still be illegal.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Gentleman must know that in local government no decision can be taken unless there is some legal concurrent to a report that councillors are considering. However, on the GLC's "Fares fair" policy no one knew that that was unlawful under the Transport (London) Act 1969 until the court case. Not even the Minister who steered that Act through the House of Commons knew.

Mr. Stevens: We are talking about surcharges and GLC councillors were not surcharged for that.

Responsibility for making sensible use of money within the limits is one which hon. Members have tried to advocate over the years. It is only because that responsibility has been abused and because people have sought to go against Government policy and expenditure that the present position has arisen. It is almost an ill will that has been brought about that has demanded that councillors in that position must take note of what is demanded of them and act within the law.

If the Bill were enacted, any group of councillors could go ahead irrespective of the Government, not only in the area of finance but in other areas as well. That surely is not what local government is all about.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman who has been so good at giving way, but may I put it to him that even if the Bill becomes law, which I hope it will, the common law will still enable British citizens to take action against councillors. Is it not the case that the Tameside affair, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), was countered by action in the courts? Were

not previous acts of local councillors, such as those at Enfield some time before, also countered by action in the High Court? Is not that course still open even if the Bill becomes law?

Mr. Stevens: The law still has a part to play but the law should remain as it is to those who wish to go against local government expenditure right at the forefront. That is what this is all about. It is about local government spending as it wants to, not as the Government of the day say it can. That must be in the forefront. As my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts) said, it is about the rule of law and financial aspects.

It is too easy to take the course which in some cases has been taken. For example, some hon. Members did not like rate capping but nevertheless it became the law. If people go against such a law there must be suitable penalties.

Some people in local government may find themselves constricted by their beliefs of what is good for their town. When I was in local government and there was a Labour Government, some of the laws that were passed caused us concern and difficulties with which we did not want to deal. We would have preferred to have acted in some other way. But there was no thought that we should go outside the law and that should not be changed. Most people in local government do not want confrontation. It is mainly politically instigated policies which force such a situation. *[Interruption.]* Politics are fine provided that one stays within the law. Choices exist but local councillors are not free to go through the roof on rates and expenditure.

Mr. Loyden: How does the hon. Gentleman discriminate against a council that is faced with breaking the law by following the provisions of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and that to which he is referring?

Mr. Stevens: The job of local government is to adjust its finances to give the services that it can within the expenditure which it is allowed. That is a matter for it to sort out in the ways that it can and it has the opportunity to do that. An enormous amount of money is still going into local government from the Exchequer and the rates. It may be that expansion cannot take place at the speed that some people want, but services can be provided over a certain period and plans can be made for future expenditure. Restrictions are not such as to prevent local government giving a good service in many areas. That is sometimes blown out of all proportion. We know that over the years demands on local government—not just by statute but by the electorate—have become greater and greater. That has encouraged councillors to branch out with public expenditure on "glory palaces" which one councillor persuades his colleagues are necessary. Perhaps that expenditure is good for some areas, but that is not what local government is about. The basic function of local government must be to provide basic facilities on which the community can build. That does not demand tremendous expenditure or the wildly abused expenditure we have seen.

These deliberate attempts to tackle and argue with central Government outside the courts set a deplorable example, especially to young people. These people who have been elected to responsible offices in local government are prepared to say, "We do not care about the law. We shall do what we want." That is what will happen under this legislation. It brings local government into disrepute. Many people, whatever their political party, who serve in local government have a tremendous commitment to the job, yet those who are prepared to flout the law bring them into disrepute.

People have grumbled about provisions imposing accountability on auditors. Surely the auditor is the man who can best pick out what is likely not to comply with the law in local government finances. I believe that the auditor should have the power to instigate an investigation and to bring the matter to the attention of the court. The court can then decide whether the council's actions are illegal. Without a provision to this effect, I fear that a considerable number of councillors will be tempted to go beyond what the law allows and therefore to jeopardise the council's general operations and schemes. We know of the effect of extortionate rates on business.

In recent years, local government has instituted more and more subsidies wherever it wants. This must be brought under control. If subsidies are not controlled, we are faced with the problem of local councils going over the top in terms of rates and expenditure.

So far, thank goodness, not many general offences have been committed. I believe that if we remove the controls that have existed for a number of years there will be a temptation to say, "There will be no surcharge. We are all right. We shall get clobbered. We shall be told off, but nothing will really happen." Councillors must be aware that they must act within the law and be responsible for their expenditure and that, if they operate outside the law, they must answer to the courts and perhaps suffer a financial penalty. We know what happens outside local government—if people do something wrong, they are penalised. If people abuse the system, why should they not be penalised financially?

When Labour Members are in opposition they do not want real accountability of local government to central Government. That is not the case when Labour Members are in government. They then want more accountability to central Government and control of local government. This legislation gives us little control. I would not willingly give up control.

I understand the depth of feeling on this issue especially of those hon. Members from Liverpool, where there are great difficulties. I believe that it is essential that we keep control within the law and that the people in control of spending know the full penalties that can be imposed under the law if they abuse the laws of the land. If they want to be martyrs, that is their choice. Responsible councillors are willing to act within the law. All councillors should do so.

10.24 am

Mr. Eris S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) apparently did not understand what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) was saying. We are debating a Bill to change a law which has been oppressive and has acted against ordinary people who have not wanted to break it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), first, on having the good sense and decency to introduce this legislation and, secondly, on the case he made. He made a first-class, well-documented speech. His case was well argued, and only bigots could possibly oppose it.

[Mr. Eris S. Heffer]

I have been disappointed over the years with my party's attitude to this issue. We should have abolished this oppressive legislation a long time ago. Even before Clay Cross, there was the St. Pancras case. A most distinguished Member of the other place became a Member when he had only just finished paying off money he owed because of the surcharges imposed on him in St. Pancras. He had been disqualified for many years from holding any public office. Why? Because he was a criminal? He was disqualified because his council had come up against the then Government's policy. The councillors had made a stand and found themselves in difficulty.

The original idea was, rightly, to have safeguards against corruption. No one argues against that. Any councillor who is corrupt and takes back-handers for planning measures and so on must be dealt with. No one defends or supports them, whether they are Conservative, Liberal or Labour councillors. If after going through the due process of the law they are proved to be currupt they must be dealt with. We do not want corruption in local or in national politics. The Bill is not concerned with corruption, however. Surely no one suggests that because Liverpool and Lambeth councillors delayed setting a rate, they could be described as even mildly corrupt. Conservative Members have the right to argue that such action was politically wrong. Even some of my comrades have said that. However, no one can say that they are guilty of corruption and that they should be surcharged, disqualified and treated as criminals — certainly not because they have reacted politically to a political situation.

The rate support grant for Liverpool has been reduced by £350 million since the Government came to power. That money has been filched fr m the city and the council has been faced with the problem of running the city with a considerably reduced budget. Where does it get the money from? What is it to do? It can either increase the rates or reduce services, and a reduction in services leads to redundancies.

Liverpool councillors are faced with an unemployment level of 23 per cent., with all that that means to the ordinary people of the area. They have said, "We shall not be responsible for creating redundancies, cutting vital services and allowing housing conditions to worsen. We must deal with the drug problem and the other difficulties that face Liverpool." I say that they should be commended and supported, not be brought before the courts.

Mr. Cash *rose——*

Mr. Heffer: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to make his own speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Garston referred to Poplar. Incidentally, one of the Poplar councillors who went to prison during the 1920s was George Lansbury, and the House will be aware that he became the leader of the Labour party. He was not a criminal. There are bad laws and sometimes individuals are forced by the prevailing circumstances to come up against them, especially when they are class or political laws.

Suffragettes did not secure the vote by being good, passive little girls. They had to put a few bricks through the windows of Cabinet Ministers' homes to bring attention to their cause. Women have the vote now because a comparatively few women chose to fight and to break the law.

Laws are changed in this Chamber, but often those outside this place have to take action and to make themselves martyrs before we respond. Action is taken outside to spotlight a bad class or political law and make us realise that we must change it.

No one in Liverpool and Lambeth has broken the law——

Mr. Tony Banks: Or any windows.

Mr. Heffer: The councillors of Liverpool and Lambeth have merely deferred setting a rate. A rate has now been set in Liverpool, and there has been an increase of 9 per cent. As a Liverpool ratepayer, that has not made me particularly happy. Liverpool residents pay some of the highest rates in Britain. When the Liberals had supposed power and control of the city, they deliberately kept the rates at a low level. When the Labour party regained control, it was faced with the present Government's attitude towards local government. The Labour-controlled Liverpool council found itself in difficulties immediately because of the rate that it had inherited from the Liberals.

I accept that the Labour-controlled Liverpool council can be criticised on a number of grounds. I have frequently heard Conservative Members criticise the GLC, for example, for setting up a woman's committee and spending money on projects with which they do not agree. Nothing like that has been done in Liverpool. Rightly or wrongly, the Labour-controlled council has not set up a women's committee. It has not done many of the things that other Labour councils have done. Instead, it has done simple things like building houses. It has built more houses than any other council, and they have been built for working people.

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Will my hon. Friend lay to rest the rumour or the lie that the Government have put out that the Labour-controlled Liverpool city council is responsible for big-business interests withdrawing from the city? The reverse is true. Builders are coming into the city and there is a boom in the byproducts of the building industry. That is true of the glass, steel and timber industries, and workers in those industries are getting jobs.

Mr. Heffer: I am glad that my hon. Friend has made that point. The Government have introduced legislation to prevent local councils issuing political propaganda. Liverpool, like other councils, issues a printed sheet which explains what is happening in the city and all the major advertisements that appear in it are from the building companies. They advertised to such an extent that it cost the city council nothing to circulate the sheet.

Mr. Fields: Instead, it made a profit.

Mr. Heffer: That is right. That happened because business interests, especially in the construction industry, were delighted by the council's actions and felt that they should advertise.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is nothing in the Local Government Bill or in the code of practice that will prevent right and proper advertising by building companies in Liverpool?

Mr. Heffer: I have said nothing about advertising by employers' organisations. Of course there is nothing to stop them advertising. However, if there were the suggestion of the slightest political statement, it would be stopped. I was making the point that business interests, especially in the construction industry, are more than happy with what the Labour-controlled city council has done. The same goes for other industries.

The council has built sports centres. There is massive unemployment in Liverpool, and many of the unemployed are young. The development of drug abuse is horrifying. Liverpool must be one of the worst areas for it. This is because there are so many in the area who have nothing to do. They have no work and some of them are becoming demoralised. The council has built sports centres to try to get people off the streets. They are wonderful sports centres. I have been to see them, especially those in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Garston opened a sports centre in my constituency, and I was only too happy for him to do so. Nursery schools are being provided, which helps young women who desperately need it to take employment. The council is also providing many other services.

We are not ashamed of what our people have done. We are ashamed of and opposed to the system that brings our people before the courts. There is no justification for that, as there was no justification for the action taken against the Clay Cross and St. Pancras councillors and other councillors way back to Poplar. The law must be abolished.

If we took up the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) and amended the law to apply to Government Ministers, many of them would soon be disqualified from holding office. I appeal to hon. Members not to be blinded by sheer political prejudice. If political prejudice is not part of this law, the Government should follow my hon. Friend's suggestion and introduce a Bill to deal with Members of Parliament in exactly the same way as the Act deals with councillors. The country would benefit from that because so many Ministers would be disqualified for wasting money.

I appeal to the House to give this important Bill a Second Reading. My hon. Friend the Member for Garston has done a great service to the people by introducing it.

10.42 am

Mr. William Shelton (Streatham): I followed the speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) with great interest. Lambeth councillors are in this predicament, not because they did not set a rate, but because by not doing so they have cost the community and the ratepayer money. I do not know when we will have the result of the case. I have sympathy for them, but they were warned of the consequences of their actions.

I very much agreed with the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens). We must consider the root causes of the decision to introduce the rate-capping legislation and the legislation which this Bill, introduced by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), seeks to abolish. I suppose that both pieces of legislation are designed to control the behaviour of certain councillors. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), perhaps inadvertently, put his finger on the matter when he spoke of councillors acting responsibly.

In general, councillors have acted responsibly in past years. Why has there been a change in more recent years? I do not think that Opposition Members would disagree with my belief that during the past five or 10 years there has been a form of confrontation politics quite new to local government. That has reached a fine flower in the borough of Lambeth, where I have my constituency, and has cost the community dear. The councillors have acted irresponsibly. I shall not detail the catalogue of waste and inefficiency in their administration. We need only compare the boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth, which are side by side and which have similar populations of about 245,000 to 250,000. The number of council staff in Lambeth is more than 10,000, while in Wandsworth there are fewer than 6,000——

Mr. Allan Roberts: What about the services?

Mr. Shelton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to a speech that I made some time ago, which I should be happy to send him, when I compared the services of Wandsworth and Lambeth.

The rates in Lambeth average £11 a week, while in Wandsworth they average £6 a week——

Mr. Allan Roberts: Does the hon. Gentleman approve of the practice of the private refuse collection service in Wandsworth, which is breaking the law by having only two people with each wagon? Does that not mean that the engine of the wagon is left running because the driver has to empty the bins? Is that not illegal? The private firm is doing that to keep within its tender.

Mr. Shelton: Like the hon. Gentleman, I would never approve of anyone breaking the law. After all, that is what we are discussing today.

The confrontation politics that have led the Lambeth councillors into this predicament have other manifestations that are damaging to my constituents and the borough of Lambeth. They range from the dangerous—even the sinister—to the absurd. An example of the dangerous is the hostility of Lambeth council to the police, which manifests itself in a number of different ways. For example, the community police liaison committee, set up as a direct result of Lord Scarman's report, has been denied the use of Lambeth town hall for its meetings and is having to find alternative premises. Meanwhile, the council has set up its own police committee in competition with the Lord Scarman-based consultative group. Not only is that very damaging to the borough, but it is a pity that such a thing should happen. The council, in certain areas, has even refused consultation between the police and social services.

The council has attempted to exclude opposition members from its committees. It issued a questionnaire requesting various details about the private incomes of councillors — to which we have been delighted to respond — and about personal affiliations, such as whether we belong to certain clubs, to which we have refused to respond. The Conservative group had to apply for an injunction so that it could attend committees. That is confrontation politics.

At the other extreme—the absurd—the council has made an extraordinary proposal to rename 28 landmarks at a cost of £5,000. It is intended to rename Streatham Pool "Mangaliso Sobukwe Pool" — where we and other political parties hold meetings — and Brockwell Park

[Mr. Shelton]

"Zephania Mothopeng Park". That is what happens with confrontation politics. I find that so absurd that I have contacted the local newspaper and offered a prize of £50 for the renaming of another landmark, Councillor Knight.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I wish to make it clear that that proposal—which was not from the council, but from a committee chairman—would probably be illegal after 1 April, so it is extremely unlikely that it will ever see the light of day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is very interesting, but I find it difficult to relate it to the Bill before the House.

Mr. Shelton: The rate-capping legislation and the legislation which the Bill seeks to abolish were the results of confrontation politics——

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) really under the impression that the Bill has something to do with rate capping?

Mr. Shelton: The purpose of the Bill is to abolish the legislation that allows the disqualification and surcharging of councillors. That control was placed on councillors because of confrontation politics. Equally, rate capping is a control on councils because of confrontation politics. The situation has become a great deal worse during the past five or 10 years, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. The reason for that and similar legislation that controls the behaviour of certain local councillors is that they have been acting irresponsibly. Their irresponsibility is part and parcel of a whole, which has been damaging to Lambeth.

The burden of my argument is that, because of the damage that has been caused to my constituency, I shall not support the Second reading of the Bill. I support the continuation of the present legislation because of the difficulty of controlling irresponsible politicians.

Why has that happened?

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Shelton: I shall give way in a moment.

It has happened because of the new breed of Left-wing politicians. I have already mentioned Councillor Knight. He is the leader of the Labour party of Lambeth and he is, I am told, a member of the Workers Revolutionary party. Labour hon. Members and my hon. Friends will know what the Workers Revolutionary party stands for—anti-democracy, confrontation, and so on. That is why, when one has a leader of a council who has those inclinations, one must have the kind of legislation which the hon. Member for Garston wishes to repeal. That is what I am saying. Thank heavens we do have such legislation.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman would be most unwise to repeat outside this House what he has just said about Councillor Ted Knight. The hon. Gentleman might be a wealthy man, but he would have little money left after he had been taken through the courts, because he has just slurred the reputation of the leader of Lambeth council.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman clearly misunderstands the Bill and the whole question of surcharging councillors. It can be traced back to 1834. I do not know about confrontational politics, but at that time the intention was to stop local councillors from dipping their fingers into the till, and that law should be introduced to stop Members of Parliament from doing that as well.

Mr. Shelton: I do not think that the House would accept the suggestion that hon. Members are dipping their fingers into the till. I do not believe that councillors dip their fingers into the till either. The law has been in force for a number of years. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) tells me that it was in force before 1834.

What has happened in Lambeth and Liverpool is, to the best of my knowledge, unique. As far as I am aware, that number of councillors has not previously been surcharged by the auditor.

Mr. John Fraser: What the hon. Gentleman said about Councillor Knight would be libellous if repeated outside the House, and I think that he would be right to withdraw the allegation.

Mr. Shelton: If the hon. Gentleman had listened, he would have heard that I said I had been told, by a number of different sources, that he is a member of that party. If Councillor Knight wishes to deny that, I shall look forward with interest to reading his remarks.

It is a lack of political control—extremism—among local councillors which has brought about the legislation which the hon. Member for Garston is trying to repeal. In my view, it is right and proper that such legislation should remain in existence, to protect the members of the public who are in boroughs controlled by those Left-wing politicians.

10.54 am

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The speech of the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton)—I shall not call him the hon. Member—and the speech of the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) together represent two of the clearest statements that I have heard of the Conservatives' attitude towards democracy. Their view of society is that if the Tories are in power, by definition they are behaving responsibly, even if they sell off our most priceless assets, run down the welfare state and destroy the prospects of employment. That is responsible and non-political. If, however, a group of people win the support of the electorate for a contrary policy and the Conservative party finds itself not in a majority, it no longer believes in the democratic principle. The district auditor is called in to decide what action is to be taken in a local authority.

The question of acting responsibly is a central question, but responsible to whom? The district auditor is responsible to nobody. He is not responsible to the House, he cannot be defeated in the House and he cannot be dealt with by the electorate. The core of the argument is that the Conservative party says that if one is anything other than a Conservative, one is, by definition, political and irresponsible. Therefore, if by chance such a person wins, the Conservative party says that it will have other ways of dealing with him.

To cover that up, the Member for Streatham comes out with a direct smear about a distinguished local government leader, Ted Knight, knowing quite well that the newspapers will print that tomorrow and that the lie will be used to damage the leader of an elected council. One cannot do more than remind the House that the purpose of privilege is to protect people, not to use the protection of Parliament to destroy public reputations. The speech of the Member for Streatham is one of the most disreputable speeches that I have heard in nearly 36 years in the Chamber of the House of Commons.

I am proud to be a supporter of the Bill. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) has done a great service. He has brought into focus the real issue, which is that in Britain we have an unjust law, and the prime victims of that unjust law are not the councillors but the people they represent. It is their interests which are adversely affected.

As this is a Friday morning, we can perhaps be more clinical. I shall draw a contrast between the conduct of private capital and local democracy. If any two Conservative Members set up a company, make some money and the company goes bankrupt, they are not bankrupted or surcharged. They are protected by the Companies Act 1980 and could set up another business the following day. In some cases, I have heard it said that companies go bankrupt and the old owners then buy the assets of that company from the receiver at a knockdown price.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I am not giving way, because I want to get my point across with absolute clarity.

If one is a private business person, one can leave a trail of bankruptcies among sub-contractors, buy the company back, sack the people employed and still be free the following day. However, if one is a locally elected councillor, there is no such protection.

I shall take a classic case of two famous men who reduced fares — Freddie Laker and Ken Livingstone. Freddie Laker reduced fares and went bankrupt. He left many people out of work and others could not manage to pay their bills because they had been sub-contractors. Freddie Laker is a hero of the Government and has been knighted for his pains. Ken Livingstone, only a symbol of the local authority, introduced cheap fares and was taken to court before Lord Denning. Somebody later explained to judges what a bus was, and in the end they reached a compromise. The reality is that if local government tries to meet transport needs by lowering fares, councillors, if they do not pay their fines, are at risk of imprisonment, bankruptcy and surcharge, but private business men can make profits by leaving a trail behind them. That is what the Bill is about.

In a clinical sense, we are seeking to change class legislation. Since Victorian times class has not been allowed to be mentioned. In Victorian times the upper classes looked down on the lower classes. When Karl Marx told the lower classes there were more of them and that if they banded together they could change society, class ceased to be a respectable word to use. If we are returning to Victorian times, let us resuscitate Victorian language and discuss the fact that there are more poor people than rich ones. Democracy in local government allows poorer people to buy collectively, by the ballot box, what they cannot afford individually.

That is what democracy is about. I do not know how many hon. Members are dependent upon public provision or require council accommodation in which to live, but if one cannot afford the services that one needs—home, nursery school, education or pension — democracy is about buying it collectively by using the ballot box.

That is what the Chartists and the suffragettes were about. They were not interested in obtaining seats in this place. They saw democracy as a route to social justice. The same is true of trade unions. We are not discussing them, but if people band together they can get back in wages from their employer a share of the profit that they make. If not—that is why Murdoch has stopped trade unionism—one has to put up barbed wire and publish the Wapping lies which come out in *The Sun*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*.

This Bill brings out the point that the Tory party hates democracy because it gives the people the power to get a fair share of the wealth that they create. Democracy limits market forces and it must be hammered on the head wherever it appears. That is why the GLC has been abolished. That is why rate capping has been introduced. That is why the latest Local Government Bill has been introduced. It prevents people from even speaking to one another if they have elected their local authority. That is why the Government use the courts against councillors, to make them seem to be criminals. That is why the Government are now talking about development corporations. If there is a local authority which they do not like, the Government set up a corporation. It is not democratic. It is put in the heart of the inner city. The Government then give money to their business friends to make a profit out of the poverty of the inner city without that corporation being responsible to the electors in the towns.

The Tory party is the enemy of democracy. That point comes out through all the legislation. I heard the speech by the hon. Member for Nuneaton. He talked about how marvellous it was in the old days when councillors behaved responsibly. I acquainted myself with 100 years of Birmingham government from 1838 to 1939—long before all the dangerous extremists appeared. In 1838, the municipal charter instituted elected councillors in Birmingham; 1842, the establishment of the police force; 1850, the first city asylum; 1861, public library; 1867, art gallery; 1870, school board; 1872, first medical officer; 1874, first municipal hospital; 1875, city takes over the supply of gas—that was not the hard Left in 1875—corporation begins clearance, city fire brigade; 1876, city takes over water supply. That was 110 years ago. We are not returning to Victorian England if we return to that. In 1890, Birmingham has the first municipal houses; 1898, city takes over the supply of electricity; 1904, city commences operating tramways, Welsh water supply commences; 1908, city takes over care of maternity and child welfare; 1916, municipal savings bank; 1919, municipal orchestra, beginning of big municipal housing; 1930, city takes over public assistance, and in 1939 municipal airport opens.

That was Victorian municipal enterprise. It took place largely under a man who later became famous—Joe Chamberlain—the great Liberal leader who realigned himself and later became the great Liberal imperialist. The House should not be told that we are going back to Victorian England. The roots of municipal Socialism began in Victorian England. If the Conservative party tries to take us back to that period, it will find that it is not just attacking Socialism; it is attacking the tradition of public responsibility in government.

The Bill removes disqualification. By removing it, the Bill would restore two controls on local councillors. If a councillor is corrupt, he or she should be prosecuted by the police. If he or she behaves in a way that the electorate does not like, he or she should be defeated at the polls.

[Mr. Benn]

There should be nothing between the police court and the polling station to prevent councillors from serving the interests of their people.

Mrs. Rumbold: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman could clarify something. Is the support that he gives to the Bill shared by his Front Bench?

Mr. Benn: The hon. Lady has asked a silly question because she knows that the Front Bench is about to speak. She intervened to create a diversion from what I am saying, which must be painful to her.

When those councillors appear before the judges, the press will regard it as "Red" Ted or Derek Hatton being hauled before the judges on some criminal offence. If the judges decide to punish them, the court's punishment will be vested in the people waiting for housing or public services and in those whose names are never mentioned in the newspapers, because the newspapers do not want the public to know that those councillors stand between them and poverty and despair. It is an attack upon people in the inner cities, but whose councillors are up for prosecution.

The Bill merely restores the position to what it should be. The police court or the polling station are the only hazards that councillors should face. Councillors should be free to provide any services which are in the interests of the people—to acquire by purchase or to hold any land or buildings; to establish any company, as any Government can; to assist by way of grant, loan or subsidy; to make grants to voluntary bodies; to provide services of news and information; and to undertake any activity not explicitly prohibited by Act of Parliament.

This is not a constitutional discussion. We are not spending Friday morning doing an A-level course in local government. We are talking about how we shall get back to full employment. The police yesterday advertised on television their new high technology warfare, because the Government have failed to solve the nation's problems. The police are now the ultimate weapon of local government. The police are the ultimate weapon of industrial policy, because when people are left to rot on the dole the answer is not a vigorous, vital local authority; it is men in flame-proofed jackets with shields against petrol bombs, because the Government know in their heart —that is why they are looking for a new leader—that they cannot ignore social justice and expect public support. Our history proves that. We should develop local government to meet that need.

Looking back to the 1930s, what ended unemployment was public expenditure. It was all on weapons of war, and I do not recommend that. It was public expenditure to build ships, guns and aircraft. That took people off the dole. When they were in work, like the building workers in Liverpool, they paid taxation, and we returned to full employment. Public expenditure ended the slump. Granny did not buy a tank and dad did not have an A registration Spitfire in the garage. It is by the agency of public expenditure, nationally and locally, that we shall end unemployment.

The greatest and most sensitive agent of public expenditure is local government, because councillors know what needs to be done. They can meet the needs of people for 24-hour-a-day care for old people, day-care provision for mothers with children, proper libraries and sports facilities, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Garston spoke. In that way we can restore full employment and demobilise the riot police, because there will be no need for them.

That is the issue that we are discussing. By introducing the Bill, my hon. Friend has performed a great service, because without the normal hype of a debate about controversial Government legislation, the House has an opportunity, through his wisdom, to focus its attention on the real question—whether profit is to take precedence over need, and whether we are to have democracy or market forces running the country. Those questions will determine the outcome of the next general election.

11.10 am

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): First, I must declare an interest. I am a ratepayer in London. That is one of the reasons why I wish to speak in this debate. However, there is something much more important behind my wish to take part in this debate. I was elected as a Conservative and Unionist Member of Parliament. I support our unitary Parliament. I support the occasions when English Members of Parliament intervene in Scottish business, as they regularly do. The Bill does not apply to Scotland but that does not mean that I, as a member of this unitary Parliament, have no interest in it. That is why I thought it wise to declare my interest at the beginning of my speech. I care fundamentally about this unitary Parliament. A matter of constant discussion in Scotland is whether or not there should be a unitary Parliament.

Mr. Dixon: The hon. Gentleman says that he is a London ratepayer. Will he also point out that his rates are reimbursed from the public purse in the form of expenses?

Mr. Walker: I do not deny that that is so. I should not be a London ratepayer if I were not a Member of this House. I do not claim any special privileges or rights, but that does not change the fact that I have an interest in seeing that the public purse gets good value for its money, either through me or in any other way. The hon. Gentleman does the House a disfavour if he thinks that simply because hon. Members draw expenses for staying in London we lose interest in getting value for taxpayers' money.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has a marvellous facility for forgetting facts. He referred to what happened in the 19th century but he failed to refer to the last Labour Government of which he was a member. Does he remember the capital programmes that were slashed by the Government of which he was a member and the massive cuts in public expenditure that had to be made during the period when he was in office? Of course not. He has a selective memory, as have so many other Opposition Members. But this does not surprise me. It is distasteful for the right hon. Gentleman to lecture us about privilege, upbringing and the class war. I do not know where he went to school, but I know where I went to school. I know what my father worked at; I am fairly sure that he knows what his father worked at.

Mr. Benn: Do not be insulting.

Mr. Walker: To suggest that if somebody holds a different political view from the right hon. Gentleman he is less than a democrat does a great disservice to democracy. In a democracy we have differences of opinion. We are attempting today to change the law through the democratic process. I commend the hon.

Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) for going about that process in the proper legal manner. However, it is wrong to suggest that, because we obey the law, those who deliberately break and flout it must also be commended. It is not true that change has been brought about because people have deliberately flouted the law. That is a very selective way of looking at history. Many of the great changes have been brought about because of the mood and the will of the country. That is the way in which democracy functions. It is a fragile creature. It cannot be sustained when it is flouted by a large number of people. That is the death knell of democracy.

Democracy functions correctly when we consider a Bill such as this. That is why I, a Scottish Member of Parliament, am in London on a Friday morning. I care deeply about the proper democratic function. I want to go back to my Scottish constituency and say that I was in the Chamber today because a Bill was being discussed which affects what I believe to be the fundamental roots of our democratic system, particularly at local government level.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Gentleman said that democracy is created according to the mood of the people. What does he believe is the mood of the people now? A mass of legislation has been pushed through Parliament very quickly. If a trade union does what it has been set up to do, it is not fined for having broken the law; its funds are sequestrated and its functions are caught well into the future——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Those matters do not arise under the Bill.

Mr. Walker: Thank, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall not reply to that intervention. I could do so, as you know, because you and I have served in Committees on trade union Bills. You are well aware of my credentials in the trade union movement. Therefore, I thank you for your protection when the hon. Gentleman intervened, but I am sure that you realise——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not protecting the hon. Gentleman. I am protecting the House and its procedures.

Mr. Walker: If the procedures protect me, I am thankful for them.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield is very selective in his criticisms. Is he telling the House that he expects Government Ministers to be surcharged when things go wrong? I hope he is not. It is a horrendous suggestion, if one remembers the enterprises that the right hon. Gentleman brought into being that later found themselves in dreadful financial trouble. I draw attention to that point merely to show how selective is the right hon. Gentleman's presentation of facts.

The Bill provides for the abolition of

"The system of surcharge and disqualification as it applies to members of local authorities, and for connected purposes."

I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Garston. He believes that the district auditor is not being fair and reasonable. But the district auditor has to operate within the law. All forms of public expenditure that he examines have to be judged to be reasonable. There are many forms of public expenditure that some members of the public judge to be unreasonable, but if it is lawful it is right for councillors to continue to spend money in that way.

If Parliament and the Government judge that the law needs to be changed because it is not protecting the taxpayer, so be it. This made the Labour Government of which the right hon. Member for Chesterfield was a member act as they did. I do not argue about that. They acted in the best interests of the country at the time. Sometimes difficult decisions have to be taken. I am sure that it was a difficult decision and that they did not enjoy taking it. If it was acceptable to the Labour Government to do what they did in the interests of the country, why is it wrong for another Government to do exactly the same? Councillors know and understand what they are entitled to do. As the law stands, their scope for spending money is considerable.

Mr. Wareing: Will the hon. Gentleman give just one instance during the lifetime of a Labour Government when any councillors were surcharged and disqualified?

Mr. Walker: When a Labour Government are in office, Tory councillors and Tory Members of Parliament support that Labour Government in their efforts to do what is in the best interests of the country. Tory councillors have never indulged in public expenditure that is contrary to the wishes of central Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Shelton) referred earlier to confrontation politics. Confrontation began in its worst form under the last Labour Government. It was a sad day for the Labour party when that happened. It has destroyed a great deal of its credibility in terms of its wish to form a Labour Government.

Whether the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) are right in suggesting that my Government are unpopular will be judged when we go to the polls. That is how Parliament works. I am happy and prepared to face my electorate with the record of my Government, and my record. In case the right hon. Member for Chesterfield should think that I am concerned about the Labour party, I point out that it picked up 2,100 votes in my constituency, so the Labour party is not a threat to me, although other parties may be.

The Labour party talks about the rights of working people. To suggest that somehow the district auditor and the Government are against the working people is to distort the truth and stand it on its head. Working people are best represented and looked after when both central and local Government are working in harmony. Where, for whatever reason, they are working in disharmony, that cannot be to the advantage of the people. Sadly, that is what we have seen.

Anyone who suggests that Members of Parliament and Ministers should operate in the way that councillors operate is failing to read carefully the laws as they apply to councillors. I suggest that they should also look carefully at the situation in which some of their colleagues would have found themselves, such as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, if they had been so accountable when he was a Minister. Both he and I know that that would be nonsense. It is only when one is out of office that one makes nonsensical proposals. When in office the Labour party has never attempted to carry out such policies.

It has been said that the Labour Government should have done something about this situation when they were in power. However, they did not do anything about it

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because when in office they were restricted by the obligations that office places upon them, and that means running the economy effectively and efficiently. It is very easy, when one is out of office, to take a different view of financial disciplines.

There was talk about attacks on trade union rights, the erosion of the NHS, industrial unrest and the Berlin wall. All that is nonsense and has nothing to do with the Bill. None of the examples is relevant or directly related to it. The hon. Member for Garston made an interesting speech, which meandered through these points. He suggested that the Berlin wall, which was built to keep people in, is similar to the fences put up in the United Kingdom to keep people out, which is nonsense. Everybody has a right to protect their properties.

If, in future, we are to have sensible local authority expenditure, we must not continue with the nuclear-free zone policy. For example, anybody who knows anything about Derby knows that Rolls-Royce has had a nuclear reactor in that town for years. To suggest that the local authority is acting in a reasonable manner by then making Derby a nuclear-free zone is not logical. The district auditor can say that any expenditure on declaring Derby a nuclear-free zone, and allowing the councillors to indulge in all the activities such as attending conferences and spending on publicity, is hardly reasonable expenditure. I cannot speak for the district auditor—it is not my place to do so—but were he to say that, any sane person would agree. However, we are faced with such nonsensical action.

I care deeply about the fact that Scottish Members should be seen to be participating in unitary Parliament activities, and I hope that English Members will understand that that is my sole motive for speaking. If this legislation were acceptable in England and Wales, the probability is that it would eventually find its way to Scotland.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that the fact that the Bill is unacceptable is shown by the three examples, quoted widely in the press, of Derek Hatton, Ted Knight in Lambeth, and Red Ken Livingstone in the GLC. There are no greater examples of councillors disregarding the Government's legislation.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, although he has rather pre-empted what I was going to say at the end of my speech.

The Bill has not been caused by the Labour party's urgent desire to change things. Its Government had every opportunity to do so between 1975 and 1979, but did not. The Bill has come about because the Labour party sees it as an opportunity to gain publicity, to try to encourage those councillors who have deliberately set out to flout the law. The councillors made a virtue of what they were doing. They have sought and obtained massive publicity and they believe that by doing this they will at the end of the day find themselves forgiven and that somehow a Labour Government will rashly make a pledge that, in retrospect, the councillors will only be admonished. That is a mistaken and foolish attitude. I know that the Bill will get substantial publicity, but I do not believe that it is in the interests of the House to suggest that people who deliberately flout the law having been warned that they are doing so should be let off. To agree to that is to put democracy at risk.

11.26 am

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), who is my most distinguished constituent, on introducing the Bill which will give assistance not only to many people thoughout the country but to people who, in voluntary service, put themselves forward as councillors. It will do so immediately, and is immediately needed by many. The cases of Roberts v. Hopwood in Poplar in 1925 and of the Clay Cross councillors have been mentioned, and one would have thought that, after Clay Cross, legislation would have been introduced by a Labour Government to reimburse those councillors for what happened in 1973. However, under the Tory Government the situation has become not better but worse. As a result of the Local Government Finance Act 1982, private auditors may now take councillors to court.

We have often asked in this context about the meaning of "unlawful". It was established as long ago as 1848, in a case involving the Lichfield corporation, that even where a local authority funds a service that in all other cases is legitimate, it is open to a district auditor to argue that the local authority is spending too much on that service. That is the most undemocratic feature of the system.

It is said that the district auditor can decide when a local authority has abused its powers, but who is to say what an abuse of powers is? Parliament has never defined the word "abuse" in relation to the principle of ultra vires.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Wareing: I am sure that the hon. Member, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be able to make his point later.

Parliament has not defined the principles according to which district auditors should act. They have been created haphazardly. As a result, councillors, who volunteer—they do not receive enormous salaries—to carry out the mandate on which they were elected, are forced to put their jobs, their livelihoods, their accommodation and even their marriages on the line. Conservative Members should think seriously of the repercussions that must be faced by councillors, whether in Liverpool, Lambeth or Tameside, who might have been faced with similar circumstances in the 1970s.

Mr. Terry Fields: A catalogue of so-called red names of people who proudly stand up on behalf of those who elect them has been given. Would by hon. Friend like to comment on people such as John Hamilton, who has a Church background? His conscience-stricken situation at the moment is whether he should break the law or break the poor in Liverpool. He has come down firmly on the side of the people who elected him. He is facing the law and everything else to do the right thing on behalf of the people of Liverpool.

Mr. Wareing: I fully appreciate that. The leader of Liverpool city council, Councillor John Hamilton, a Quaker, has fought all his life for the people he represents. He knows what it is to live in poor accommodation. He has to work for his living—no shares on the stock exchange to fall back on for him. He drives to the council

chamber in nothing more than a corporation bus. He knows about the poverty and problems of people in the area. He is a noble Christian gentleman, who, if he were a member of the Tory party, would be held up as highly virtuous by it, which, of course, he is.

The courts have been given the maximum discretion concerning abuse of powers. That has created the maximum of uncertainty. I know from my experience as a Merseyside county councillor that we are given contradictory advice from counsel. Because of the powers that have been given to district auditors, councillors have to shop around for counsel to tell us what we want to hear. The statutory powers are said to be exercisable by local authorities "as they think fit" or "for any purpose", and have been construed by the courts as having "implied limitations". One of the first things that I heard when I was elected to Merseyside county council was that I had to be careful to abide by my fiduciary duty and that the fiduciary duty was always to the ratepayer. However, in tackling problems on Merseyside and other deprived areas, we must remember that many of our electors are not ratepayers.

Why should only ratepayers have fiduciary duty owed to them by councillors? Do not councillors owe a fiduciary duty to the whole population in their area? Do they not have a fiduciary duty to the electors to carry out the mandate on which they were elected? Is it not a breach of fiduciary duty when a Liberal-controlled Liverpool city council fails, as it did in the 1970s, to implement the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 as it affected telephones for the handicapped? Is it a breach of fiduciary duty when a council fails to provide decent housing, decent health centres and decent schooling for the local population? The trouble is that the district auditor does not know how to decide what laws should be enforced and what laws should not necessarily be enforced.

The advice that is given to local authorities is always equivocal. Counsel told us in Merseyside when we were implementing our electoral pledge to reduce bus fares, which has been highly successful and has increased passenger use by 27 per cent. since 1981, that, in carrying out our electoral mandate, we might offend the fiduciary duty that we owed the ratepayers. The Labour party has had increasing support as a result of that policy, but those who elected us in 1981 had a right to expect that we would carry out our fiduciary duty to all of our electors, not just those who pay rates.

When we talk about fiduciary duty in regard to finance, do not pensioners, the disabled and the poor pay taxes? Even under this miserable Tory Government, who have reduced rate support grant from 61 per cent. of revenue to 46 per cent., is not that 46 per cent. provided by taxpayers —those who pay VAT or customs duty on alcohol or tobacco? Do not pensioners, the disabled and those on rent rebate also contribute to the public fund through taxation? Do we not have a fiduciary duty to them? The law has not a leg to stand on. It is a good example of the old adage that the law is an ass.

Mr. Watts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wareing: Only if the hon. Member is brief.

Mr. Watts: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a local elector has the right to make an objection to an item in the accounts? It is not restricted to ratepayers. Electors who contribute as taxpayers also have that right.

Mr. Wareing: I am talking about fiduciary duty. When the county solicitor advised county councillors, who were opposing Great Universal Stores, which wanted to prevent the county from reducing fares—we won the case—we were told of our fiduciary duty to the ratepayer. It was ludicrous. Officers were telling us that, if we spent £157 million, we might just be within our fiduciary duty, but that if we spent £165 million, which we determined that we would spend, we would somehow or other be ultra vires. What is ultra vires and what is intra vires is decided not by electors, who should have the ultimate sanction, but by judges in court where councillors have to prove their innocence. That is the only time when people go before a court of first instance and have to prove their innocence. They are not regarded as innocent until proven guilty.

Councillors are unique among people elected to public office in being put under such liability. When the Secretary of State for Transport came humbly on a Friday at 11 am a few weeks ago to apologise to the House after having been found guilty and unreasonable in the courts by imposing higher tolls on users of the Severn bridge, we accepted his apology. We criticised him and attacked him politically, but we did not say that henceforth he must give up his house, his car, and his golf sticks, and that he must be disqualified from holding office.

The Secretary of State should be disqualified for tearing our transport system apart. Our sanction on him is the general election, and that is the only sanction that there should be on councillors, whether Tory or Labour, who attempt to carry out their mandates. Councillors in Liverpool and Lambeth are faced with class legislation that is throttling local democracy, and ensuring that we become the most centralised state in Western Europe. Indeed, there is not a single instance of that sort of power being given to district auditors outside the United Kingdom.

We are told that what is right for the Secretary of State for Transport when he breaks the law, not once, but three times, is not right for councillors. There is and should be only one sanction and that is the sanction of democratic elections.

11.40 am

Mr. John Watts (Slough): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) spent little time on the merits of his Bill, which is not surprising, as it has few. Instead, we heard a tirade against the Government for waging a war against the rights and liberties of the British people, and an accusation that we have spent seven years attacking local democracy. The reality is different. Recently, throughout the country, Labour groups on local councils have been taken over by militant Marxists. The occasion when the now noble Lord, Lord Mackintosh, was replaced by Mr. Livingstone as leader of the Greater London council may be a good example of that.

Mr. John Fraser: What is a Marxist?

Mr. Watts: I generally leave matters of socialist theology to the Labour party. If the term "Militant" is more acceptable to Labour Members, I shall use that. It is well understood, especially in Liverpool, and I do not think that it can cause misunderstandings.

The example of Mr. Livingstone becoming leader of the GLC should serve as a warning to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) about what may happen

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to him if Mr. Livingstone succeeds in replacing the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) at the general election.

The concept of service to the community, which has always been the underlying principle of local government, has been placed on the back burner as Labour councils have increasingly looked to local government as a platform from which to attack the Government of the day. Concern for the community, which the council is elected to serve, has been a secondary consideration. The GLC sought a much wider role than that within its statutory responsibilities. Terrorists were invited to our capital city, to the disgust of most Londoners. That had nothing to do with the legitimate responsibilities of the council. Millions of pounds of ratepayers' money has been wasted on political propaganda, and millions more have been squandered on worthless Left-wing causes which have tarnished the description "voluntary organisation". More recently, we have seen cynical political attacks to bring chaos to services and insolvency to some of our great cities.

Mr. Wareing: If so much chaos has been created by Left-wing councils, should not the electors, rather than an unelected district auditor, get rid of them?

Mr. Watts: I accept part of the hon. Gentleman's point. Indeed, if the proposals for the reform of local government finance, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has introduced, are implemented, local authorities will be much more accountable to their electors, and the sanction of the ballot box locally will be much more effective than it has been recently.

We have seen deliberately unbalanced budgets, and the wilful refusal even to set a rate. Many of those Left-wing loonies are caught in a time warp. In their own tiny minds they are acting out the circumstances of Russia in 1918. They see this as their opportunity for a great Socialist revolution.

Mr. Wareing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask for your protection. I did not know that district auditors' powers extended as far as Moscow. The hon. Gentleman is dragging in many irrelevancies which are taking up our time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was distracted and was not listening to the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that he will relate his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. Watts: I was picking up some of the points made by the hon. Member for Garston, who alleged that local government democracy has been under attack from the Government whom I support. I have sought to correct that, and to explain how I see what has been happening in local government — the context in which some Labour councillors are fearful of the sanctions of disqualification and surcharge.

Unfortunately, the activities that I outlined are not harmless pursuits, such as cavaliers and roundheads, or re-enacting the American civil war. People who are unlucky enough to live in areas which are subject to the yoke of such authorities suffer when chaos is brought to the services that they require. Those disturbing trends are of relatively recent origin and, mainly, go back to the death of moderate socialism at its defeat in the 1979 general election.

I first entered local government 12 years ago, when Hillingdon council was Labour controlled. It was almost unthinkable that any Labour authority, let alone a Tory authority, would seek to break the law in pursuing its policies locally, however much it disagreed with the constraints upon it. Earlier the House was reminded of the one exception of Clay Cross. Now, unlawful action is fast becoming the norm, and for that reason the courts are increasingly becoming involved in local government affairs.

The power of surcharge and disqualification is not new, but the willingness of many loony Left-wing councils to embark upon courses of action which render their members liable to sanctions is new. The change has come from Labour council members who are willing to place themselves in circumstances where they may be subject to those sanctions, in the pursuit of some sort of political martyrdom.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that that means that those local authorities have an absolutely clear idea about what they are doing? Every example shows that they have every opportunity to rectify their actions, because they are given warning after warning and negotiations are protracted. Does he agree that it is an absolutely clear-cut deliberate policy to undermine local democracy?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Deliberate decisions are taken to embark on courses of action. I doubt whether hon. Members can recall any instance of a councillor being subject to surcharge or disqualification through unwittingly breaking the law. District auditors have sought to apply that sanction in instances where councillors have deliberately embarked upon a course of action which they know to be unlawful.

Mr. Terry Fields: The hon. Gentleman is speaking in ignorance. In Liverpool, councillors do not formulate policy. The rank and file members of the district Labour party give the brief to the councillors. Liverpool has total democracy and total accountability. The pressures on councillors are much greater, because those pressures come from the rank and file members.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman reinforces the powerful point just made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). The attack on local government democracy arises not from this Government, but from the anti-democratic tendencies of the Labour party. The decisions of the general management committee and its mandate to pursue courses of action govern those decisions, not the councillors' perception of their duties to the electorate. I understand local democracy to mean that councillors are elected by local voters and that their duty is to those electors and not to a district management committee of the Labour party.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) has completed the circle for us? He has told us that trade union activity gives rise to breaches of law. Does my hon. Friend accept that it is the trade unions in Liverpool who have agreed to bail out the councillors and that that is where the problem arises?

Mr. Watts: The democracy of which we speak and which the majority of people understand is a different animal from democracy as defined by Militant members of the Labour party.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I regret that I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), but I have heard the speech of the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts). If local councillors are elected by local people on a specific political programme put forward by a political party, why should they, in the hon. Member's terms, be contolled by the district auditor and the Secretary of State for the Environment, and not by the wishes of the local people who elected them in the first place?

Mr. Watts: I shall deal with that point more fully later in my speech, but the quick answer is that councillors have no right to get themselves elected on the basis of promises which they cannot carry out without breaking the law.

In my 12 years in local government, which included six years as leader of the London borough council of Hillingdon——

Mr. Wareing: I would not boast about that.

Mr. Watts: I am happy to boast about it, because during that time we did many things of which the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) would approve. Within the financial constraints imposed upon us, we had a deliberate policy to develop our social services. We had special success in developing care for the mentally handicapped and the mentally ill. If the hon. Member for West Derby were to examine the history of the development of social services in Hillingdon, I hope that he would be generous enough to acknowledge the major strides that were made during that period. I do not take all personal credit. It was the democratic will of the Conservative group of the council, supported by the electorate.

During my years in local government, especially when I was leader of Hillingdon council, I did not feel cowed by the sword of Damocles of surcharge and disqualification which Opposition Members have said hangs over councillors. The idea of thousands of councillors in constant fear of bankruptcy because of the excessive powers of the district auditor is ludicrous. However, I was aware of the special duty of care that I owed to my ratepayers in determing expenditure of public money. There was an ultimate penalty for transgressing and not fulfilling that duty. Surcharge and disqualification are no more a threat to a councillor who goes about his duties in a lawful manner than the death penalty for murder is a threat to a law-abiding citizen who has no murderous intent.

Councillors can respond to the needs of their constituents, which is what we did for almost eight years in Hillingdon, but they must do so by lawful means. Election to a local authority does not confer the right to raid the pockets of ratepayers without limit or to spend the loot indiscriminately.

The answer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is that it is no good making election promises that cannot be fulfilled by lawful action and then complaining that the law frustrates the democratic mandate. The hon. Member for West Derby said that councillors are forced to break the law to carry out their mandate. They are not forced. They impose that difficulty upon themselves by making promises which they cannot fulfil within the constraints of the law.

There is a duty on all who participate in the democratic process to uphold the rule of law. I was disturbed by the speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and his doctrine that it is legitimate to defy bad law. That is a highly dangerous principle, which strikes at the roots of democracy. There are political differences about what constitutes bad law or bad government, but bad laws enacted by bad Governments can be changed through the ballot box. However, it is the ballot box at a general election that provides the opportunity, not the so-called local mandate. If individuals feel that in all conscience they cannot obey the law it is a matter for them to decide whether to break it, but if they do so they must accept the consequences. If breaking the law involves the unlawful expenditure of other people's money, it is right that that expenditure should come out of their pockets.

Mr. Heffer: The councillors in Liverpool have broken no law. It is interesting to note that since this matter has arisen the Government have introduced legislation to set a date for fixing a rate. Prior to that they had no such legislation. What is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Watts: It is remarkable that it has been necessary for us to legislate for a date for a rate to be made, because it was always understood by Tory and Labour local councillors that they should set a rate before the start of the financial year. It was only because of the curious developments in Labour-controlled local authorities during recent years that that legislation became necessary. In answer to the hon. Member for Walton, as I understand it, action was taken against Liverpool councillors not because they failed to make a rate by a specific date, but because by failing to make a rate and, therefore, failing to raise revenue within the new financial year, Liverpool council incurred unlawful loss. The matter is still before the courts. I would rather leave it to the courts to determine the law than give my layman's view on the present position.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the hon. Gentleman also note that a bizarre consequence of the Government's efforts to remedy the problem is that although the Local Government Bill, which is in the other place, provides a duty to do so, it will still not be against the law to set the rate after the end of March? That is not the case in Scotland, and it will not be the case in England. Even the remedy does not achieve what the hon. Gentleman believes is the lawful position. The position is not clear, and it will not be clear even if the Local Government Bill is passed.

Mr. Watts: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing the matter to my attention. I shall examine the Bill when it comes before the House.

There is no case for the change in the law that is advocated in the Bill. With the increasingly irresponsible activities of Labour councillors, ratepayers need protection which the sanction of disqualification and surcharge can provide. I urge the House to reject the Second Reading of the Bill.

12.1 pm

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): The debate is disappointing in that I have not heard any Conservative

[Mr. Stan Crowther]

Member deal with the central argument. They have talked about many other things, but not about the heart of the matter, which is nothing to do with whether people should be allowed to break the law, but about whether one category of people, alone in our official and constitutional structure, should be subject to personal surcharge in respect of decisions that they make, not as individuals in pursuit of their personal interests, but in an official capacity as elected representatives of the people. Not one Conservative Member has defended that anomalous position. I support the Bill 100 per cent. because it tries to get rid of that long-standing gross injustice.

It was inevitable that recent events in Liverpool and Lambeth would be mentioned many times in the debate. I do not wish to enter into that argument, because my reasons for supporting the Bill are coloured by events that happened long before now — indeed, many of them happened in the 1930s in other parts of the country. It is a long-standing injustice, and it is greatly to the credit of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) that he has given the House an opportunity to remove it. I hope that that opportunity will be grasped.

There is a dispute about whether the law has been broken in Liverpool and Lambeth, even among my hon. Friends from Liverpool. Some say that it has, and some say that it has not. It is for the courts to decide. I shall not join Conservative Members and denounce people for having broken the law when the courts have yet to decide. It is disgraceful that a decision has already been made by the district auditor in advance of a decision by the courts. That is untenable.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman says that the decision has already been taken by the auditor. He knows the true position. The auditor is responsible for examining the position and for forming a judgment. He then applies to the court, which makes the decision.

Mr. Crowther: The hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about. The district auditor levies the surcharge. It is then for the people who have been surcharged, if they can afford it, to seek justice in the courts.

Mr. Wareing: On the question of cost, does my hon. Friend accept that those councillors must pay the cost of obtaining justice through the courts?

Mr. Crowther: My hon. Friend is right. I am surprised that Conservative Members do not understand how the system works. The Bill tries to remove the injustice of the system.

I do not defend members of local authorities who deliberately, as a matter of policy, put themselves outside the law. If there are such members—it has not yet been decided—I am not here to defend them. But I am here to defend the great majority of members of local authorities, who do their best to protect the interests of the people whom they represent in the face of immense difficulties, mainly created by the Government, with the threat of surcharge always hanging over them.

Conservative Members misunderstand the position when they claim that a member of a local authority who does not wish to go outside the law need not worry about the threat. That is simply not so.

Mr. Simon Hughes: This is an extremely difficult area of law. I believe that I am right in saying that in all cases where local authority members ask for advice from their officers during a council meeting and are given advice which says that their actions carry no risk, they are safe. Only if they go against the advice that is properly given and properly received do they risk disqualification and surcharge.

Mr. Crowther: The hon. Gentleman is right up to a point, but it goes a little further than that. If the legal officer who advises the council says, "I am not sure ", the councils' action may be illegal or it may not. If the councillors, who genuinely believe that their action is legal, decide to take that action and the district auditor finds them to be acting outside the law, they will undoubtedly be surcharged.

Mr. Cash: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman made that point, because it reinforces my earlier point that the auditor must assess the position. If he comes to the conclusion that the case should go to the court, it goes to the court and the procedure continues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman replies to that intervention, may I say that several hon. Members are still waiting to speak. Hon. Members cannot have it both ways. They cannot make repeated interventions and then seek to catch my eye and make a speech.

Mr. Crowther: I do not wish to pursue the point, but I repeat that the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) is wrong.

Our main cause for complaint is the existence of surcharges. Too many hon. Members, too many Ministers —not only in this Government—and too many senior civil servants tend to regard members of local authorities either as potential criminals or as backward school-children. The real problem is Government attitude, and it is about time that it was changed. By holding out the threat of personal penalty, Parliament is saying that it does not trust the people who are elected to local authorities. Oddly, by implication, it is saying that it does not trust the people who elected local councillors, although they are the same people who elect us. We should have a little more confidence in those who are elected to local authorities under our democratic system.

It is fundamentally wrong that thousands of intelligent, conscientious and hard-working people, whose only concern is the welfare of their fellow human beings, should have to live under the shadow of a surcharge if they inadvertently step outside the narrow bounds of legal expenditure. It is wrong to pretend that such people are not threatened. It is even worse that elected representatives are placed at the mercy of unelected, unaccountable district auditors, whose actions cannot even be challenged or questioned in the House.

The Secretary of State has no responsibility for the actions of the district auditors. It is disgraceful that people who are not accountable, even to the Secretary of State, can find a councillor guilty without a trial yet cannot be called to account for it unless that councillor is able to take the district auditor to court and have the decision reversed, at enormous expense.

The greatest wrong of all is that councillors should be placed in the position of having to make a choice between

accepting the verdict of the auditor, which may well render them bankrupt and put them out of their homes, or trying to raise the finance to enable them to go to the High Court to obtain justice. Where else in English justice do people have to prove themselves not guilty? Where else are people presumed guilty until proved innocent?

The large number of Ministers who have had to be taken to court for committing illegal acts has brought that inequity into the public eye. People are beginning to wonder about this sharp contrast. I am not sure at the moment whether the Secretary of State for Transport or the Secretary of State for Social Services holds the record for the number of appearances in court. They have both had a large number of appearances. People are asking why a Secretary of State who has committed an unlawful act on a massive scale should suffer no penalty whatever while a councillor who, in the opinion of the district auditor, has just gone outside the legal limit of expenditure may well find himself bankrupt and lose his home. That situation is becoming a matter of public concern.

But the contrast goes much wider than that. There is no other category of people in that position. Let us consider the contrast with the police, for example. There has recently been a regrettable increase in the number of people who have had to take the police to court to secure damages as a result of assault, wrongful arrest, false imprisonment and so on. Only the other week a highly respectable woman was awarded £26,000 in damages against the Metropolitan police commissioner as a result of some quite shameful acts committed against her by some officers. We all know that the Metropolitan police commissioner will not pay that £26,000. Much more to the point, neither will those officers who committed those disgraceful acts. The public funds will pay that £26,000, yet that is a form of public expenditure that is a direct result of wanton criminality by certain police officers. On the other hand, if a local authority spent £26,000, not as a result of some crime committed by its officers, but to provide some kind of amenity for the public which, in the district auditor's opinion, it did not have the legal power to provide, the councillors will be asked individually to pay that £26,000 out of their own pockets. There is no way in which that can possibly be justified.

Like other hon. Members, I have some experience in local government. I was a member of Rotherham borough council for about 17 years and I am probably the only hon. Member who represents a town of which he was twice elected mayor, so I have a fair amount of experience. Incidentally, one of the daftest things that Liverpool has done is abolish the office of lord mayor, because the mayoralty is the symbol of civic pride. It is the focal point of municipal independence, which many of us wish to defend against the Government. However, that is a slight digression.

I can assure hon. Members that local authorities are put off doing that which they know would be in the interests of their people because of a possible doubt about whether the expenditure might be just outside the legal limit, which would mean that they would risk finding themselves surcharged. It is not a question whether such spending is really unlawful, but whether the district auditor thinks that it is unlawful.

I must admit that I was sometimes impatient with some of my over-cautious colleagues—as I thought then—who were unwilling to take a risk in such circumstaces. But I recognise that it is not an act of cowardice to decline to take such a risk when a councillor with a family and a mortgage has all kinds of commitments to meet. He is not being cowardly when he steps back from the possible risk of surcharge. That results in authorities not carrying out many worthwhile projects, because there is just that danger. I understand the dilemma that people face. They should not be placed in that position.

That is the worst feature of the surcharge system. The real problem is not that some may—I do not know whether councillor Hatton and his friends have deliberately chosen to break the law; that is a matter to be decided—have broken the law, but that people who have no wish to break the law but quite properly wish to go to the limit of legality in doing their job are prevented from doing so because of this threat.

As other hon. Members have pointed out, there is ample scope within the present civil and criminal law to deal with any unlawful acts that may be committed by local authorities and their members. Indeed, the very fact that the courts have managed adequately to deal with law-breaking on a large scale by Secretaries of State without surcharging them must prove that point.

This is an outstandingly good Bill. It is long overdue, and I hope that it will have the full support of the House.

12.16 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The Bill should be rejected by the House. When we get down to it, we are dealing with the rule of law and respect for the law. The Bill proposes to take away the real teeth in the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and the Local Government Act 1985, because they say that after a series of protracted negotiations, when advice has been tendered and people have deliberately decided that they will do what they want, they are then surcharged, in the light of a deliberate and determined effort to make sure that they do not comply with the reasonable requirements of the law.

Basically, the Bill is an attack on lawful and responsible local government. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) gave us a brief introduction to the history of law relating to audits and referred to the 1834 Act. I would prefer to go back a little further and remind the House that this goes back as far as Aristotle, believe it or not. He said:

> "Inasmuch as some of the magistracies handle large sums of public money, there must be another office to receive and account and subject it to audit, which must itself handle no other business, and these officials are called auditors by some people, accountants by others, and so on."

Therefore, it is interesting that, although the precise provisions set out in the local government legislation with which we are concerned today have been enacted fairly recently, the objective of an auditor and the need to contain the irresponsible misuse of money—unlawful expenditure—by local authorities has been known from the days of ancient Greece. Therefore, it must be clear to all that these provisions should not simply be knocked out because Labour Members want to achieve their own political objectives. That is what we are talking about. The Bill is a political attack on the need for reasonable public expenditure.

The hon. Member for Garston referred to the hangover from Victorian legislation. As public expenditure grew, provisions were laid down in the 1834 Act and the legislation that followed to ensure that people used their money responsibly. How can people act properly with this

[Mr. William Cash]

threat hanging over them? The simple answer is that they can do so by behaving responsibly and reasonably. Every case has been well set out in the minutes of the local authorities concerned. The details have been given to the auditors and there have been negotiations. I challenge Labour Members to suggest that there has been any peremptory action or unreasonable haste by an auditor.

Mr. Tony Banks: I remind the hon. Gentleman of the threat of the district auditor which curtails reasonable action by the council. I have a clear example. The GLC hoped to put some homeless and down-and-out people in the Charing Cross tunnels, which came within the responsibility of Westminster city council. There was a cleansing problem. As cleansing was a matter for Westminster city council, there was the possibility that GLC members would have been surcharged if they had taken that reasonable action. The threat of surcharge stopped them from doing so. It is not a matter of whether councillors are doing something wrong. It is a matter of whether they are prevented from doing something because of the threat of surcharge.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman is confused about the difference between the threat to an unlawful act and the threat to a policy which councillors would like to pursue but which may not be authorised by law. That is where the problem lies. I do not deny for a minute that there are serious problems in Greater London and Liverpool. They should be sorted out. People should have a reasonable amount of money available to deal with them. The question is whether, in implementing policies, the local councillors have been reasonable.

As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) comes from a London constituency, I hope that he will not mind if I give a few instances of the manner in which the Inner London education authority has behaved. It has broken new ground in finding ways of spending money. My examples are directly relevant to the question whether a surcharge should or could be levied against councillors if and when they use their powers unreasonably. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West says that there is a point at which it is difficult to know whether people have committed an offence. I understand that. Equally, when advice has been tended, policy takes over. It is a case of saying "We know what we want. We shall do it anyway. We have had advice." I shall not mention the chambers concerned, but I am well acquainted with the lawyers who provide good information on both sides of the legal spectrum for public authorities and ratepayers. They get the balances fairly right. It is a case of councillors, having been faced with good advice, deciding to go ahead anyway.

The Inner London education authority has spent £750,000 on party political advertising; five officers on the equal opportunities staff cost £86,000 a year; 12 staff of the multi-ethnic education unit cost more than £120,000 a year; and the Karl Marx centenary celebrations cost £35,000. ILEA has spent money on the "Class test" in the class room to identify the social classes of London schoolchildren. I am prepared to concede that some of that expenditure gives rise to questions about whether it is outside or inside the powers.

Recently there has been an interesting debate and legislation has been passed with respect to sections 137 and 142 of the Local Government Act 1972. The essence of the argument then was similar to the argument that we are considering now. There comes a point at which it is clear that the courts know what is political when they see it. Despite my enthusiasm for the legislation dealing with political advertising—it is important legislation in its own way—at the end of the day the courts will say, "We know what is political when we see it." A number of well-established cases in the House of Lords going back a long way say that. There are parameters within which it is preferable for councillors to be properly advised so that they can make a judgment before taking action giving rise to an auditor's inquiry.

Labour Members have specifically referred to Liverpool. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) spoke just about as much humbug as I think I have heard at any time since I had the honour to become a Member. I shall do my best to quote him accurately. He went on about laws that are bad when they are class laws or political laws. He categorically stated that they should be broken. He said that people should make themselves martyrs. He referred to the suffragettes, but I can see no comparison between the suffragettes and Ted Knight. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will elucidate in due course.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that women would have won the vote as quickly as they did—it took a long time—if the suffragettes had not regularly broke the law?

Mr. Cash: The short answer is that we do not know.

Mr. Hughes: What does the hon. Gentleman believe?

Mr. Cash: I believe that the pressures building up would have ensured that women received the vote, notwithstanding their activities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member will please return to the Bill.

Mr. Cash: I am sure that you will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was merely responding to an intervention that was a little beyond the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member was complaining that reference had been made to the suffragettes. He then wanted to go into the history of the suffragette movement.

Mr. Cash: I unreservedly withdraw my remarks in so far as they imply any questioning of your judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Walton and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) support the motion of trying to change the law rather than that of breaking the law. That is important, because some Labour Members have implied that they are more interested in ascertaining whether it is possible to railroad legislation rather than seek to change it. I happen to disagree profoundly with what is being said about breaking the law. I profoundly disagree also with the objects of the Bill. However, I accept that it is the right of hon. Members to seek to change the law. None the less, I do not think that the Bill has the slightest chance of being enacted, but only time will tell.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield asked an important question. He observed that the heart of the issue is to determine who is responsible to whom. The auditor is responsible to the court and to the ratepayers. I shall deal

with the fiduciary duty of councillors to their ratepayers, but first I shall refer to a comment which I have come across in an article which appeared in *The Guardian* of 10 September 1985 concerning Ted Knight of the Lambeth council, in which, according to the newspaper, he referred to the auditor in the following terms:

"This unaccountable state official has the power to act as judge and executioner."

Bearing in mind the time that Mr. Knight has spent on and around this subject with his officials and legal advisers, he should know that that is clearly not the case.

The recent report of the Audit Commission states:

"Auditors have the legal power to obtain whatever information they feel necessary to carry out their duties, and have a statutory function in matters involving illegality or losses caused by deliberate or inadvertent misconduct."

This is relevant to Mr. Knight's remark.

"They are ultimately answerable to the courts in exercising these powers. If auditors consider that a local authority is doing, or has done, something which it has no legal right to do, they will first discuss the situation with the authority. If they then feel it necessary to go further, they can apply to the court, either the High Court or the county court, depending on the size of the sum involved, for a declaration that the item concerned is unlawful. Auditors can take this step as soon as they determine."

This takes up the remarks of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) about when the statutory function of the auditor begins. He might like to refer to section 15 of the Local Government Act 1982, where the statutory duties of the auditor are set out clearly.

The Audit Commission's report continues:

"Auditors can take this step as soon as they determine that an authority is spending money illegally. They do not have to wait until the end of the year or for objection from a ratepayer. But they have no standing to apply for an injunction while the case is decided. The court can then, if it agrees, order the rectification of the accounts. It may also order the unlawful expenditure to be made good by those responsible for incurring it. If those responsible are members of the authority and the amount involved exceeds £2,000, the court may order their disqualification from membership for a period of five years."

The most important point then follows. The report states:

"If the unlawful action is inadvertent and there has not been any unacceptable loss of the authority, there might be no useful purpose served by going to court. It might only be necessary to ensure that the error does not occur again."

As I have said in interventions and repeatedly in my speech, a protracted—rather like my speech—series of negotiations is involved. It is important to remember that, because a series of warnings has been given, those concerned do not have any justification for complaining when the chopper comes down at the end of the day. As the report states:

"However, if they decide that there is a loss due to deliberate misconduct or failure to account for money or goods, the auditors can themselves order those concerned to repay the money."

How do these provisions arise in their application to councillors, and what will the effect of the Bill be on those concerned? The answer lies in schedule 1. I am concerned that there has been little reference in the debate to what is contained in the Bill and that, instead, there have been many generalisations. In fact, we are being asked to accede in principle to the taking away of a real opportunity for ratepayers to take appropriate action to ensure two things: first, that there is no unlawful expenditure, and, secondly, that there is no wilful misconduct in the way that money is spent.

It is important both for this House and for those outside to know what is going on. Section 19 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 clearly states:

"Where it appears to the auditor carrying out the audit of any accounts under this Part of this Act that any item of account is contrary to law he may apply to the court for a declaration that the item is contrary to law except where it is sanctioned by the Secretary of State.

(2) On an application under this section the court may make or refuse to make the declaration asked for, and where the court makes that declaration, then, subject to subsection (3) below, it may also—

(a) order that any person responsible for incurring or authorising any expenditure declared unlawful shall repay it in whole or in part to the body in question and, where two or more persons are found to be responsible, that they shall be jointly and severally liable to repay it as aforesaid;

(b) if any such expenditure exceeds £2,000 and the person responsible for incurring or authorising it is, or was at the time of his conduct in question, a member of a local authority, order him to be disqualified for being a member of a local authority for a specified period; and

(c) order rectification of the accounts."

Surely any reasonable person would say that where it was clear that there had been unlawful behaviour, the person involved should be subject to those sanctions. However, and this is important, the provision in subsection (3)—by this time the matter has gone past the auditor, the behaviour has begun to bite and all sorts of negotiations are taking place—is that

"The court shall not make an order under subsection (2)*(a)* or *(b)* above if the court is satisfied that the person responsible for incurring or authorising any such expenditure acted reasonably or in the belief that the expenditure was authorised by law."

In other words, that that person had received advice that he was right to take such action.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): Is that not the very point referred to by Opposition Members regarding the "Fares Fair" policy where the advice given did not make it clear whether the policy was within or without the law?

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend is right. I have no doubt that during my speech I shall refer to that.

Some interesting statements have arisen in the courts. Other interesting statements have been made by the auditor in Liverpool which clearly illustrate the great care taken at all times. I hope to quote the remarks of Mr. Stamford on that matter. Indeed, with the indulgence of the House, I intend to refer eventually to the Clay Cross case and what Lord Denning had to say about that—after all, that fair-minded man is often referred to by Opposition Members as someone who can be relied upon to help the poor and the needy.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): When my hon. Friend talks about Clay Cross, will he remind the House of the odd remarks of the then Labour Law Officer, Mr. Sam Silkin, who did his own career no good by the way in which he tried to wriggle over Clay Cross?

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have ample material among my papers to enable me to go into that matter, which turned out to be a very miserable and third rate situation.

The point I am making is not that the court may not, but that it shall not make an order. That is what we call a mandatory provision. It is not permissive. It is not that it may, but that it shall

"not make an order under subsection 2*(a)* or *(b)* above if the court is satisfied that the person responsible for incurring or authorising any such expenditure acted reasonably or in the belief that the expenditure was authorised by law, and in any other case shall have regard to all the circumstances"—

[Mr. Cash]

I hope that hon. Gentlemen are listening, because I find this interesting—

"including that person's means and ability to repay that expenditure or any part of it."

What does the Bill actually do? Believe it or not, it repeals that provision and makes the position worse for the councillors in Liverpool. I sincerely hope that the newspapers in Liverpool will take careful note that the hon. Members for Walton, for Garston and Liverpool everywhere else are making the position infinitely worse than at present. Furthermore, for the ratepayers of Liverpool the business of surchage and disqualification cuts both ways. There are many circumstances in which ratepayers—perhaps Labour ratepayers, or even SDP ratepayers——

Mr. Simon Hughes: Or Liberal.

Mr. Cash: Yes, or Liberal ratepayers, want to challenge things done by Conservative councillors.

What happens under the Bill? Section 19(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 says:

"Any person who has made an objection under section 17(3) *(a)* above and is aggrieved by a decision of an auditor not to apply for a declaration under this section may—*(a)* not later than six weeks after he has been notified of the decision, require the auditor to state in writing the reasons for his decision; and".

In other words, he has the opportunity to find out from the auditor what he is up to and why. It goes on to say that he has the right to

"appeal against the decision to the court."

We are back to the court. It is not just the auditor. The whole farrago of nonsense that we have heard from the Opposition about the wicked district auditor is nothing more than a load of rubbish. It is the court which has the power—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Garston made a derogatory remark from a sedentary position. That is only because I am having a go at his Bill. I am relying on the Act of Parliament which he is seeking to repeal. If he wants to intervene and have words with me on this subject, I shall be happy to listen to him.

Mr. Loyden: I resist the temptation.

Mr. Cash: I think that this is a good moment to pay tribute to a remarkable book, "Local Government Audit Law" of which the hon. Member for Garston obviously does not have the faintest notion.

Mr. Loyden: Yes, I have.

Mr. Cash: If he has, I would be surprised, because the Bill that he is enacting is having a devastating effect on his ratepayers.

Mr. Hayward: My hon. Friend is talking about the ratepayers in Liverpool and he referred to the Liverpool Members of Parliament who had spoken. Is it not significant that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who previously represented Liverpool, Edge Hill, has not been present at any stage of the debate to defend the interests of his own constituents?

Mr. Cash: Indeed, he reminds me of Prince Rupert, who made a rather serious mistake at the battle of Edgehill some time ago. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention.

The subsection goes on to say:

"on any such appeal the court shall have the like powers in relation to the item of account to which the objection relates as if the auditor had applied for the declaration".

At least over one provision—I have others—there is no doubt that the Bill is a farrago of nonsense.

The Bill is about letting off people who have clearly done many things which any ordinary person of common sense would say should not have been done. Such people have been given ample warning. They have engaged in what amounts to wilful misconduct. The Bill is dealing with something serious.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, because he put his finger on the point, although I find myself about 360 deg away from his conclusions.

Mr. Simon Hughes: It must be 180 deg.

Mr. Cash: The right hon. Member for Chesterfield sometimes puts me in such a whirl that I go through a full 360 deg. I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

The right hon. Gentleman put his finger on the point, when he spoke about the real question to be decided—responsibility. I recall what he said. He asked who was responsible to whom. An enormous myth has developed about who is responsible to whom in relation to the auditor's functions. His responsibility is to the courts and to the ratepayers.

I wish to comment on the fiduciary relationship between ratepayers and councillors. The position was aptly summarised in the GLC "Fares Fair" case, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkwood (Mr. Hayward) referred. The point derives directly from the right hon. Gentleman's remarks and those of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). The statement was made by Lord Diplock, who, most regrettably, recently died. He said:

"It is well established that a local authority owes a fiduciary duty to the ratepayers from whom it obtains moneys needed to carry out its statutory functions and that this includes the duty not to expend those moneys thriftlessly, but to deploy the full financial resources available to it to the best advantage".

The legal duty of the councillors is being tested when one argues about fiduciary duty. There are a number of potential illegalities to consider. Sections 19 and 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982, which it is intended the Bill should repeal, deal with that point. The illegalities include, for example, a failure to make a rate for the relevant period, a failure to make a rate sufficient to meet estimated expenditure, deliberate expenditure during the financial year additional to that estimated for the purpose of making the rate, and so on.

Liverpool and other councils are making a deliberate and determined effort to ensure that their councillors, who have worked out what their policies should be, get what they want rather than what is prescribed by law. That is the nature of the problem. What lies at the root of the Bill is an attempt to remove the sword of Damocles to which the hon. Member for Garston referred. Anybody else, however, would refer to it as a sensible precaution. If we were to remove the so-called sword of Damocles, what would happen? If I may continue the analogy, the floodgates would open.

Mr. Simon Hughes: It is not the same analogy.

Mr. Cash: No, it is not, but it is a similar analogy. The floodgates would open and public expenditure would let rip. That is what Opposition Members want. It is rare for Conservative Members to act as the opposition and to be able to demonstrate the extraordinary behaviour in which the Opposition would indulge if they were to form the next

Government. If we repealed the provisions which the hon. Member for Garston wishes to repeal, local government expenditure would let rip and the country would be bankrupt. Liverpool would disappear into the Mersey.

Mr. Loyden: That is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Hayward: Will my hon. Friend speculate on which councillors would come through the floodgates to which he referred, and in which order? Will he consider what is happening in Hackney, Greenwich and Lewisham, which are waiting to go through the floodgates? Will he say which of those councillors would go through first, and in what order?

Mr. Cash: An extremely efficient lock gate keeper would be required to keep control over the boats as they floated over the weir. There are so many of them that, if we are not very careful, we shall be very close to bankruptcy. We have to consider not just the nice technical points but the objectives that underlie the Bill. Political objectives are being pursued by the councils to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood referred. It would be very dangerous to allow the Bill to become law, and I hope that it will not be allowed to make progress. I shall do all that I can to ensure that it does not become an Act.

I referred earlier to the grounds that have to be considered by the district auditor if it is thought that unlawful expenditure has been incurred. The most important phrases that crop up over and over again are "item of account", "contrary to law", and "failure to bring into account any sum". We have to consider whether the action of local authorities is ultra vires. For a considerable period of time I have had reason to consider the question of ultra vires. I am the first to admit that on occasions it can be a grey area. However, many people have the opportunity to seek the advice of learned counsel and they can come very close to identifying the parameters within which they are allowed to operate. In my constituency of Stafford we are facing an interesting problem over nursery schools. They have been referred to frequently in the speeches of Opposition Members.

In the Labour party manifesto of 1983, the party set out a policy to make nursery functions a statutory duty. At the moment, it is a power only. I am by no means against nursery education—quite the opposite. However, the problem is what one does when one is faced with a local authority trying to introduce such a policy. This is a graphic example, in a smaller way, of the way in which, by the unreasonable exercise of powers, local authorites in places such as Liverpool and Lambeth attempt to use in the wrong way the powers granted to them by Parliament.

When a local authority decides—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Garston would not let me intervene. If he had, that would have reduced the length of my speech dramatically. As I had such a disagreeable reception when I attempted to intervene in his speech, he will not get me to sit down until I feel that it is appropriate to do so.

In 1983 the Labour party in Staffordshire decided that the provision of nursery education should be a statutory function. We have a special problem in Staffordshire in that there are enormous numbers of nursery schools in Stoke-on-Trent. I want to keep well within the rules of order, and I shall continue to do so because there are such ample opportunities to do so on the back of this extremely poor Bill. The district auditor has recently ruled that he is deeply concerned about the fact that in Stoke-on-Trent, which is where the Labour county council has its strength, surprise surprise, there are five times as many nursery schools as there are in the whole of the county.

I raised this matter in my by-election and have done so repeatedly since, and I am delighted to see that the district auditor has taken up this matter. Therefore, I regard the Bill as appalling because——

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. By speaking about Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford and nursery education there, is not the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) bearing away from the Bill? The hon. Member has been speaking for 45 minutes. I have sat in the Chamber for three hours and I have a personal interest in the dabate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): I can rule only on the point of order. This is a Second Reading debate and therefore wide, but we are listening carefully. It is for the Chair to decide whether an hon. Member is in order.

Mr. Parry: It is a disgrace.

Mr. Cash: I was specifically talking about the powers of the district auditor in my constituency, and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) has the nerve to say that he has a personal interest when I am trying to do something to help my ratepayers.

Mr. Parry: The hon. Gentleman is abusing the House.

Mr. Cash: What is more, I am trying to protect my ratepayers in respect of the very functions that would be taken from the district auditor under the provisions of the Bill. The hon. Gentleman should be a little more careful.

Mr. Hayward: The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) complained that Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford have no interest in the Bill. Is my hon. Friend aware that the candidate who has been selected to replace the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Mr. Forrester) is herself a Lambeth councillor and would be disqualified if the Act is not amended but would be exempted if the Bill is passed? I am sure that my hon. Friend intends to refer to the fact that the Bill is of special relevance to Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend has made what I can only describe as a brilliant intervention. We are on the very pinhead of the Bill only a few miles from the constituency which I have the honour to represent. I have every intention of taking that matter up, especially as at least one hon. Member has received the most awful treatment from his constituency party. He has been kicked out on reselection——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying somewhat now. He must stick to the Bill.

Mr. Cash: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Schedule 1 would amend section 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. It is important to understand clearly what section 20 does. It provides:

> "Where it appears to the auditor carrying out the audit of any accounts under this Part of this Act—
>
> *(a)* that any person has failed to bring into account any sum which should have been so included and that the failure has not been sanctioned by the Secretary of State; or
>
> *(b)* that a loss has been incurred or deficiency caused by the wilful misconduct of any person,
>
> he shall certify that the sum".

[Mr. Cash]

To my utter amazement the Bill would also repeal section 20(2). It would remove protection from Labour ratepayers as well as from Conservative ones. It provides that a person who has made an objection and is aggrieved by a decision of an auditor

"may not later than six weeks after he has been notified of the decision require the auditor to state in writing the reasons for his decision."

I do not know how the hon. Member for Garston included that for repeal. It merely serves to show that he does not understand anything about this matter.

It is important for us to understand what "wilful miscondut" means. In 1901, it was said:

"Wilful misconduct means misconduct to which the will is party as contradistinguished from accident, and is far beyond any negligence, even gross or culpable negligence, and involves that a person wilfully misconducts himself who knows and appreciates that it is wrong conduct on his part in the existing circumstances to do or to fail or to omit to do as the case may be a particular thing and yet intentionally does or fails to do it or persists in the act, failure or omission, regardless of the consequences."

Nothing could be clearer than that. That is the pits of the bottom line. It is absolutely impossible to imagine something which needs the sanction of the law more than wilful misconduct. Section 20 turns on that principle.

I remain absolutely amazed that section 20 should be repealed. No one who has any genuine belief in local democracy, in the interests of ratepayers or in the fiduciary duty to his ratepayers — both the hon. Member for Garston and councillors should have that — could introduce a Bill which removed from ratepayers the protection that section 20 provides. All this farrago of nonsense is a determined effort to ensure that councils can let rip and do as they please, irrespective of the consequences for their ratepayers and the public at large.

I await with great interest the response of the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser).

Mr. Loyden: Sit down.

Mr. Cash: I am tempted to do so quickly because the hon. Member for Norwood will have interesting points to make. I should like him to refer specifically to what he thinks about the repeal of section 20, which deals with wilful misconduct. That puts Labour Members on the line. If they are prepared to repeal the provision and to allow local government expenditure to let rip, as councillors in Liverpool and Lambeth have done, the consequences for their ratepayers would be disastrous. No responsible Labour party could support the Bill. Will the hon. Gentleman vote for the Bill, and if so, why? If he votes in favour of it, he will be opening the floodgates to the disadvantage of the ratepayers whom he represents. The same applies to every Labour Member who votes for the Bill.

It is important that the people in those hon. Members' constituencies should know that that is Labour party policy red in tooth and claw. It is red politics of the worst sort. It is interesting to note that only a few hon. Members are present in the Chamber, and that those who advocate the Bill come from a certain section of the Labour party. But I had better return to the Bill, otherwise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may speak to me yet again.

The position in Liverpool and Lambeth, upon which most of those matters arise, has been interestingly spelt out by *The Guardian*. It stated:

"Labour councillors in Liverpool and Lambeth, who face possible bankruptcy"——

against the background of wilful misconduct, warnings, protracted negotiations, and lawyers' advice—

"under surcharge orders made by district auditors yesterday, are to be supported in their legal appeals by"——

surprise, surprise—

"funds from the Labour Party."

The Bill, far from protecting the ratepayers of Liverpool, will protect Labour party funds. But that is only half the story. The article continues:

"Mr. David Blunkett, chairman of the party's local government committee, pledged that any penalty imposed on the 81 councillors named yesterday would be remitted by a future Labour government."

That is nothing more than a short cut to the impossible day of Labour's return to government. I do not believe that that will be achieved, but it hopes to do so.

Local union officials at Lambeth have already raised about £30,000, and levies and collections are expected to go ahead at Liverpool and Lambeth. I am sorry that some Opposition Members are no longer here to listen to my points, because I am demonstrating that the Bill has far less to do with local government, its proper running and functions and much more to do with the Labour party's desire to ensure that it will not have to produce money to bail out the wilful misconduct of its members.

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has written a round-robin letter, with the support of Lord Graham of Edmonton, asking Labour party supporters to support the court case? I wonder whether this squalid Bill is a result of the failure of that appeal, because members of the Labour party are not prepared to put their hands in their pockets to support their colleagues.

Mr. Cash: Yes, indeed. I hope the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) will take into account in his summing up that some Labour authorities propose to do swaps of money to bail out other local authorities. Such action would be ultra vires. The cancer that is spreading throughout Labour-controlled local authorities needs careful investigation. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that point when she has the opportunity to read through my relatively short speech. In view of the importance of the matter, it requires to be carefully read.

I have probably stated the case in full, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am coming to a conclusion in deference to the hon. Member for Garston.

The real question is about the threshold of local authority power and the extent to which that power is reasonably exercised within the parameters of the Local Government Act 1985. Councillors have their power and their duties. Sometimes local authorities say "We have this power and we must use it because Parliament has made us do so." However, even Sir Humphrey would understand that there is a point at which that is proper and right. Parliament has enacted the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to deal with the question of whether reasonable functions, powers and duties of a local authority have been exercised properly. The district auditor's power is an important back up to that provision.

I was amazed when the hon. Member for West Derby said that electors, not the courts, should decide what is within the powers of a local authority. I hope that I heard the hon. Member correctly, and if I did not, I offer him

an unreserved apology. However, I believe that *Hansard* will show that he said that the electors should decide what is within the powers of a local authority. If that is to be the case, Labour Members are inviting us towards anarchy. That must be so because we have a unitary system of Government. Parliament gives powers to local authorities on the understanding that they will be used reasonably and that the discretion given to local councillors is exercised with appropriate judgment. Only in cases of the most wilful misconduct would the sanctions, which the Bill proposes to repeal, be invoked.

The real root of the problem — I ask the hon. Member for Norwood to consider this seriously and to tell us whether he shares the view—is whether the statement made by the hon. Member for West Derby is true. If it is, we must say goodbye to the Labour party and goodbye to democracy. It is appalling that an hon. Member should seriously suggest that. The Opposition seem to have no idea about democracy. An example of that was shown in the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill and the procedural matters which arose on it, which we discussed the other day.

The Audit Commission has produced a pamphlet which the hon. Member for Garston and his colleagues should read. It is called, "Auditing Local Government. A guide to the work of the Audit Commission". It states:

"The purpose of this booklet is to give a general account of the work of the Audit Commission."

It contains much wise advice. It will tell Opposition Members why their Bill is so much junk. It will tell hon. Members why they have spoken such a farrago of nonsense. I am more worried about the hon. Member for Norwood, who is in great difficulty. He is under pressure from Left-wing Labour Members, but he should know that in other instances where the powers of surcharge are being applied, matters are being investigated by Labour local authorities, too. In cases of wilful misconduct, will the hon. Gentleman repudiate the provisions of the Bill as they apply to councils controlled by his party?

At the end of this speech, I say that the Bill is about the proper working of local democracy.

1.18 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I have two comments to make on the speech of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). First, it was a disgraceful abuse of the privileges of Back-Bench Members. It was a disgraceful display of bad manners to take an hour of the House's time when so many hon. Members wish to speak in an important debate. Secondly, to respond directly to the question which he posed to me, I shall support the Bill. I do not say that when it passes into law there will not be some changes in the way in which it is phrased, but I support it because it fits Labour party policy.

So that we can be exact about it, I shall tell the House what Labour party policy is on such matters. It is not a mere reaction to the events in Lambeth and Liverpool, although it is all the more welcome as a result of those cases. Our policy was set out in Labour's programme in 1982 and was approved by the Labour party conference:

"Labour will act to remove the threat of personal surcharge and bankruptcy which now hangs over councillors as a possible penalty for the exercise of democratic decisions which have always been thought to be within the province of local authorities. As a matter of urgency, the next Labour government will introduce new legislation which defines as clearly as possible the degree of discretion left to local government in all areas where this is currently open to doubt."

The 1982 policy statement went on to say:

"except for acts of wilful financial negligence or corruption."

This is extremely important and I want the hon. Member for Stafford to understand what was said.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Fraser: The hon. Gentleman took up an hour of the time of the House, and I do not intend to give way to him.

In 1984 the Labour party conference reaffirmed a statement on surcharge and the matter was again reaffirmed at the party conference in 1985, when it was said:

"We will repeal the Rates Act and other repressive legislation and act immediately to remove personal surcharge and disqualification in line with Labour's Programme 1982"—

which I have quoted.

"We will legislate to restrict the powers of District Auditors to their traditional role of routing out fraud and corruption. We aim"—

this is at the centre of our policy on these matters—

"for the same system of financial probity that applies to Ministers of the Crown and directors of public companies."

We claim the same responsibilities as Ministers. Ministers say that they are men and women of integrity and that they are not irresponsible or spendthrift. They, like the directors of public companies, claim the highest standards of probity. We ask and insist that councillors be subject to the same standards of accountability and the same degree of probity as the Ministers who sit on the Treasury Bench and the directors of public companies who sit on the Benches behind them.

Mr. Parry: My hon. Friend is replying to questions raised by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who has now left the Chamber.

Mr. Fraser: I said that the hon. Member for Stafford was guilty of a disgraceful display of bad manners, and that makes the matter even worse.

We are proposing that there should be the same standards of probity as for the highest in the land.

Mr. Hayward *rose*——

Mr. Fraser: I shall not waste the time of the House by giving way.

Let us deal with the people whose duties should be copied and duplicated by local councillors. First, there is the Lord Chancellor. We say that the duties of local councillors should be the same as the duties of one of the highest judicial figures in the land, the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Hayward: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) has been mentioned——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Fraser: W. S. Gilbert said of the Lord Chancellor:

"When you're lying awake with a dismal headache, and repose is taboo'd by anxiety,

I conceive you may use any language you choose to indulge in, without impropriety."

I am sure that the Lord Chancellor is indulging in some language without impropriety. After all, the Lord Chancellor—W. S. Gilbert would have loved this—is about to be taken to court by no less than the Bar for an abuse of his powers.

When Lambeth and Liverpool councillors are taken to court for an alleged abuse of their powers, they have to pay

[Mr. Fraser]

their own costs. I declare an interest, because I am one of the trustees of the fighting fund. When the Lord Chancellor is taken to court by the Bar, he will not be paying his own costs. Even if the case goes against him, he will not be expected to foot the bill for damages.

The Lord Chancellor, let me remind the House, earns £71,500 per year, although it is true that the present Lord Chancellor does not draw that. Local authority councillors in Lambeth, Liverpool and elsewhere get virtually nothing. We do not intend to diminish their responsibilities simply because they have a lower income than the Lord Chancellor; we intend to put them exactly on the same footing. We intend to put them on exactly the same footing as Cabinet Ministers such as the Secretary of State for the Environment. If one looks at recent cases, one sees that he has become a recidivist in the number of cases for which he has been taken to court.

We intend to put councillors on the same basis as the Secretary of State for Transport, who sought to filch £50 million from the London ratepayers. He was described by the judge as acting unlawfully, irrationally and procedurally improperly. He was not asked to pay the costs of the case that he lost. He earns £45,000 a year, and we intend to put local authority councillors on the same basis of responsibility as Cabinet Ministers or a man such as Mr. Giordano, who is the chairman of the British Oxygen Co. and earns £883,100 per annum. I am not aware that he pays the costs when challenged in relation to his responsibility to the company. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made this point as well. When Laker was taken to court, he did not have to pay damages or costs, yet the Bill's opponents propose that local authority councillors should be under a much more severe restriction and face greater liability than the chairmen of public companies.

Let me state our policy clearly. Councillors should be under the same obligations as Ministers and directors of public companies. Of course there must be remedies to deal with fraud, corruption and wilful financial negligence, but it is clear to us that councillors should not be subject to crushing and oppressive regimes which apply to no Minister and no director of a public company.

The philosophical justification for the policy is long established and well precedented. It cuts across the parties. The Bill will not give carte blanche to councillors for acts of wilful financial negligence. The Bill does not rule out declarations of illegality or injunctions. It is founded on the well-established proposition that councillors acting in the belief that they are operating within their powers and that their decision is in the interest of their citizens should not be driven to bankruptcy, disqualification or penury.

We support the Aristotlian principle—I was going to mention Aristotle and shorten my speech a little—of independent audit of the accounts of institutions, such as local authorities. The power to remit surcharge where it is fair and equitable and not to charge it has long existed in our laws. It has long been accepted that the surcharge could be removed if it was not fair and equitable to charge it.

We have come to the conclusion that investing in a Minister or a court discretion to remit surcharge, or otherwise, is the wrong way to approach these matters and that the surcharge should be removed entirely except in those cases that I have mentioned. There are plenty of precedents for this.

Mr. Simon Hughes: This is an important point, and I want the House to be clear about it. Is it Labour party policy that if a person knowingly makes a decision as a councillor that will result in a deficit under the Rates Act 1985 or similar legislation, that piece of financial decision making, which imposes that extra cost on the ratepayers —it cannot come from anywhere else—would be wilful financial negligence? If so, would not such a councillor be able to be disqualified or surcharged, as was the case before?

Mr. Fraser: In areas where decisions have reasonably been taken by councillors, that is not wilful financial negligence. It is a perfectly proper exercise by councillors according to their lights. The Labour party is not unanimous about how councillors behave. Decisions vary from one councillor to another. No one doubts that the councillors who took certain decisions did so sincerely and according to their lights. In those circumstances, they should not be surcharged. What is more, there should be a system whereby those decisions can be challenged by declarations in the courts. The Bill permits the possibility of a declaration about the rightness or wrongness of those decisions, without the barbaric consequences of the surcharge. That is the distinction.

There is a long-established principle that one can remit surcharge and that in certain circumstances surcharge should not exist. It is curious that the Poplar councillors were relieved from their obligations by the then Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain. He sought to remove the surcharge from the councillors of Poplar and of two other local authorities. Someone took Neville Chamberlain to court to obtain a declaration that his remission of the surcharges on the Poplar councillors was illegal. As a result, he had to introduce a new Bill. I shall remind the House of some of the words which he used in so doing. He said:

"this weapon of disallowance and surcharge, although it may work well in the majority of cases, yet when it comes to a question of deliberate policy, such as has been pursued in these particular boroughs, breaks down when it is most needed."

I wish to emphasise the following words:

"it brings the law into contempt and, therefore, it seemed to me it was time we abandoned the plan which was so ineffective. —[*Official Report*, 15 June 1927; Vol. 207, c. 1030.]

I am not speaking in favour of Neville Chamberlain, for he put a sting in the tail and introduced disqualification. He argued that no other penalty was available to councillors who had no money. He was addressing himself to whether the surcharge could be used as a political attack on scores of councillors in Poplar and other boroughs in London at the time. Councillors had acted according to their conscience and conviction without a trace of dishonesty and with the support of their electorates. He knew then, as we know now, that the Government should not proceed with mass trials of councillors who had acted according to their conscience.

Tory policy, which creates mass martyrdom as a consequence of monetary policy, is wrong and we reject it. Exactly the same problem faced the House in 1974 when councillors in 36 councils faced the possibility of surcharge and disqualification as a result of the Housing Finance Act 1972. That measure compelled councillors to vote for something which was contrary to their conscience

and their political promises to their electorate. A law which compels individuals to vote against their conscience and their promises is a bad one.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Fraser: It was possible under the 1972 Act, and it would be possible under the Rates Act 1984, for the Government to accept the responsibility to increase rates or to peg rates. Instead, the Government take the coward's way out. They are not prepared to face that responsibility, and so they enact a measure which compels individuals, against their policies and conscience, to peg rates or to increase them. I regard that as wrong.

The House will recall that Tony Crosland addressed himself to the issue in 1974. He said:

"Councillors would become disqualified from civic office. Whole councils would be decimated; and some hundreds of byelections would be fought in an atmosphere of unremitting bitterness—a bitterness which would endure for years ahead. Secondly, we should see the humiliating spectacle of the district auditor trying to collect the money . . .

Many of these councillors stand to be made bankrupt, to have their life savings taken away and their earnings attached, and to lose their possessions, even their homes. As I said, most of them are not militant extremists. They are respectable men and women who acted on principle—through mistaken notions of right and justice. Many of them have given a lifetime of service to local government, often at considerable personal cost and I cannot believe that Conservative Members would really want to collect the full pound of flesh from these people."—[*Official Report*, 24 March 1974; Vol. 889, c. 40.]

Tony Crosland knew, and the House agreed, that collective punishment of that sort could not be tolerated and would achieve nothing. Whenever the House has come up against this issue—in 1927, 1974 and even now—it has recognised that it cannot inflict mass bankruptcies, mass disqualifications and mass collective punishment to push through Government policy which is repellant to those who have been elected and who are accountable to those who placed them in office and not to the Government Front Bench.

There is always the possibility of remission, and remission took place in 1974. The powers to remit were assumed by Neville Chamberlain in 1927. We say that that leaves far too wide a discretion.

The political power of remission was taken away in 1982. Before that, the Minister could remit. That power has now been vested in the courts. It is wrong that it should rest in the hands of judges. These are political decisions which should not rest with the Bench. Indeed, they should not necessarily rest with the Government. We must move on from the doctrine of remission and abolish surcharge and disqualification.

It is not Labour party policy that there should not be financial penalties in cases of corruption and fraud. We say simply that we should not treat people with political vengeance in order to achieve Government policy, yet that is what has happened.

I shall direct my remarks to Lambeth because I am more familiar with the position there than with the position in Liverpool. However, the cases are not dissimilar. The councillors have been surcharged on a rather narrow point—because the Crown did not pay its contribution in lieu of rates on 1 April last year, and because the DHSS did not provide the money that it would normally provide for rate rebates.

I cannot help thinking that the Crown was put up to that. It was perfectly possible for the Crown to have made its contribution in lieu of rates based on what it thought to be a reasonable estimate of the rate to be charged. After all, there was a rate-cap limit, so the Crown could easily have calculated the amount that it should pay to Lambeth. I think that the same applied to Liverpool. I know that the Duchy of Cornwall is involved in Lambeth, and I think that it was asked not to pay a contribution in lieu of rates so that the district auditor could be brought in.

The Government actually behaved responsibly and continued to pay rate support grant. Indeed, Lambeth made quite a large profit as a result of not setting a rate. I am not arguing the merits of whether the rate should or should not have been set, I say only that we made quite a bit of money out of the Department of the Environment.

The DHSS refused to continue its payment for rate rebate, and I cannot help thinking that that was an act of political vengeance, with the aim of bringing in the district auditor and putting our councillors into mass trials in the High Court.

The use of surcharge as a political act is quite wrong. This legislation must be passed quickly. After all, when the Secretary of State for Transport got it wrong and was found to have filched £50 million from the ratepayers of London—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman did not have any problems. He brought a tres grande vitesse Bill before the House at 3.30 pm and it was law by the end of the day. I hope that this Bill will be passed with the same rapidity as every other indemnity Act brought forward by Conservative Ministers during the past few years.

I shall give a final illustration of why it is wrong that the law should rest upon varying uncertainties about whether councillors have acted correctly. In April 1985 the Department of the Environment decreed that Lambeth's expenditure limit should be £116 million. The failure to set a rate was a result of that limit. Eventually, a rate was settled in July. In December, as a result of proceedings brought by Lambeth borough council against the Department of the Environment, the Department settled just before the surcharge case began in the High Court.

The Department of the Environment admitted that its decision in April 1985 was wrong and allowed a redetermination of the expenditure level in Lambeth by increasing it from £116 million to £124 million so that the very basis of the dispute about rate capping was resolved in favour of Lambeth borough council. It is upon that degree of uncertainty that councillors in Lambeth have been surcharged. We believe that that basis for surcharge is wrong, and that is why we believe that the Bill is right.

As I drove to Parliament this morning, I went past rows of houses which are badly in need of renovation, council estates with scaffold around them where work is not proceeding quickly enough, but where we have appalling housing conditions, and I went past the offices of the Department of Employment, which is the only growth industry in my borough, where people were collecting in queues outside for their dole. I looked at that and thought of what I had to defend in the House today, and I have no hesitation in supporting the Bill.

1.51 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the fact that the Bill has been introduced and that we have had an opportunity to debate what is clearly an important issue. We have long realised in local government that the law has been totally muddled,

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

inadequate and illogical. It is important that we see the way forward and try to get the country and the people who serve local government out of the hole which a series of mixed decisions has put them in.

The questions raised by the Bill are clear. Should there be controls by law on councils? If so, are the controls that exist, particularly surcharge and disqualification, the right ones? If not, what are the right ones? Should we abolish surcharge and disqualification? If we abolish those two things, does the rest of the law which is currently in place act as a sufficient safeguard for the finances in local government and the ratepayer? If not, do we have to do something to the other safeguards as well?

There is a much more immediate matter. We are currently awaiting a decision on the case brought in respect of the Lambeth councillors and there will soon be a decision on the case brought by the Liverpool councillors. They went to court, as they are perfectly entitled to do, to challenge the amount that the auditor has assessed they have to pay. Should we, in midstream, change the rules which clearly apply to them now and which they knew would apply when they made the decision? Therefore, there is the general issue and the specific issue.

Mr. Heffer *rose——*

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way when I complete this first section.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) said that the only sanction on councillors should be at their next election. I do not believe that that is an adequate sanction. I do not believe that the only sanction ever on local government — I shall come to its application for others shortly—can be the ballot box. There is a long time between one election and the next, in which much money can be spent and mis-spent and many things, short of corruption, can go on. I think that the hon. Member for West Derby should think again about whether he meant that, because if he did mean it I think that he should realise that that is a crazy limitation on what is needed in local government.

Mr. Heffer: I shall ask one simple question, which needs a simple answer. Why was the hon. Gentleman not here when my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) made his speech explaining the reasons for the Bill?

Mr. Hughes: That is a perfectly proper question. I regret not being here. I had intended to be here but I had a telephone call at home as I was about to leave from a colleague and a constituent of mine, and I had to deal with the matters arising from that. As I said, I regret not being here. I compliment the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) on introducing the Bill. I think it is important that the Bill should be introduced. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman and hope that the hon. Member for Lverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) will accept my explanation.

The debate arises because of the tension that exists between central and local government, and because local government derives all its powers from this place. For as long as that tension continues, there will inevitably be unfairness when the Government can dictate to local representatives, who are properly trying to defend their local interests, interests that are not adequately understood by the centre.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear whether he and the Liberal party support the Bill and, if so, why the Liberals in Liverpool, including the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), have asked for the law that we are trying to repeal to be used more speedily and effectively against Liverpool councillors?

Mr. Hughes: I plan to deal with that point because it is a perfectly proper one.

The example of the Poplar councillors has been cited. In the 1930s Bermondsey councillors found themselves in conflict with the Government, who refused to give what was clearly needed by a poor community that was not benefiting from Government economic policy. Those conflicts will continue. We need, therefore, to ensure that local councillors have powers and responsibilities that are as safe as possible from Government interference. We must be clear that we will not permit corruption—no one would endorse or condone that—and that we will not permit the abuse of the trust and powers enjoyed by councillors.

It would be dangerous to say that the Executive or local government can change the rules in their favour and exempt themselves from independent scrutiny. That is the danger of saying that elections are the only safeguard. I share the view that we need an independent scrutiny of local government, the Government, Ministers and the private sector. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made a valid point. If people's finances are abused, whether by local government, central Government or the private sector, they should be equally protected. It is wrong that those who invest in a limited company, which can be set up overnight, should find that they have no adequate remedy when the company goes into liquidation. The people who set up the company may not be available or liable under the law for the consequences of their actions and that is wrong. Company law has protected such people far too often.

It is also wrong that Ministers cannot effectively be taken to court when they are wrong. Examples have been cited. I was involved in the London Regional Transport Bill when the Secretary of State for Transport clearly tried to impose a greater levy on the GLC than he should have done. The court said strongly that that was wrong. He received a different personal penalty — nothing other than a telling-off—from that received by people in local government who do the same thing. There should be an independent adjudication process that applies across the board. The abuse of powers by Secretaries of State should also be dealt with.

We should consider the remedies. The law is uncertain. It is hopeless for councillors to try to understand what they are meant to be doing. They seek advice about what is reasonable. Council officers often give equivocal answers. The problem is that local government and administrative law has been arbitrarily and inadequately developed. In my borough last year, my colleagues Councillors Colley, Pemberton and Tindall had to decide — in a council where the Labour majority group was split and when Liberals were effectively holding the balance of power — how they should choose between voting to set a

deficit budget or having no budget when the advice of the officers was often ambiguous and difficult to understand. Those problems will not be resolved unless we help councillors to do their job properly.

Liverpool and Lambeth are the tip of the iceberg. Below them are the adjudications of the district auditor in places such as Southwark, Greenwich, Islington and Sheffield to the effect that an amount of money has been lost to local government by their councillors' delay in setting a rate. There is a certified cost of delay in Lambeth of £126,000. Should those who are responsible for the delay take the blame?

It is important to put on record that the 1985 anti-rate capping campaign was a confidence trick. At the beginning of the campaign those councillors who were involved knew that ultimately they would have to set a rate. When they pretended that they were not going to set a rate, they knew that eventually they would have to give in. They were therefore playing with people's money. There were endless newspaper editorials which expressed the view that this was an abuse of their position and power.

It is much more difficult to determine whether their action was unlawful. They sought advice. Ambiguous and different advice was given. There was no duty then under the Rates Act 1984 to set a rate by 1 April. Councillors were working in a legal minefield. Money as a result has been lost to local government. It has been lost by those who were elected to act on behalf of ratepayers. Councillors did not spend their own money, so they have not lost their own money. The public do not like that money being lost and wasted on their behalf.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No.

Local services cannot afford that loss, for the reasons that were given by the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), that there is a fantastic amount of work to be done by local government that cannot be done because of a lack of finance.

I shall set out in summary what I believe to be the defects in the situation, the requirements, and the position of my party. The defects are that there is no clear position for members and officers of local authorities. There is also no proper balance or equity between central and local government. There is uncertainty about the law and the position of individuals under the law. The law allows potential exploitation by elected members at the expense of the ratepayers. It permits people to abuse the system. The remedy is very slow. If there were an abuse of the fiduciary duty of Southwark councillors because of their delay in setting a rate in April 1985, it is not much use ratepayers being left to make their judgment in the London borough elections of 1986 if there has not yet been an adjudication as to whether or not that loss was validly incurred. A process that takes a year and a half to produce an answer is no adequate safeguard for ratepayers.

Reforms are therefore needed. I share the view of the hon. Member for Norwood that if the disqualification and surcharge sanctions remain on the statute book they perpetuate an anomalous position that is difficult for anybody to defend. Therefore, sanctions such as these ought to disappear. However, some speedy sanctions are needed. There ought to be an independent court of auditors, similar to that of the European Community, which can act immediately and effectively. It would mean that a week after a rate should have been set ratepayers who believed that money was being wasted or lost could get an order that would require the local authority to act. It is no use if sanctions can be applied only a year or two years later. It is certainly no use if sanctions eventually penalise people who are not serving on the council by the time they are imposed.

The Minister knows that her Government have set up the Widdicombe inquiry to look into these questions. It has a great responsibility to make sure that it proposes a package of reforms that deal with all the defects. Surcharge and disqualification should disappear, but if they do so without putting in any more controls, that allows for exploitation of the system. My party cannot suddenly agree to take away the present controls, leaving nothing there unless a replacement package is introduced so that the councillors are still accountable.

The Liberal party will vote against a Bill that seeks only to take away disqualification and surcharge, because we need a method to make sure that ratepayers' funds are not misused. The present legislation is wrong, but we do not want a piecemeal approach to its reform. We need a proper, complete approach. If the hon. Member for Garston or the Minister could say that they will undertake to bring in a package solution that strengthens remedies while including the removal of disqualification and surcharge, we would accept that.

In government, we would legislate to remove disqualification and surcharge and at the same time introduce a decent alternative package of effective and immediate controls. Their imposition would be in the hands of the electors and ratepayers, and would allow councillors the certainty that the present law does not.

1.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): We have had an interesting and sincere debate on the Bill. If nothing else, we have at least, in the contribution from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), discovered that although he will vote against the Bill, he is in favour of it in principle and therefore if there were another sort of Bill, he would vote for that. That puts into context the way that the Liberal party thinks.

For the benefit of the House, I shall try to describe the way in which I see what the Bill would do. It seeks to remove and nullify two inter-related Acts. Surcharge no longer exists — the term disappeared with the Local Government Act 1972, as many hon. Members know. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) is referring to the recovery of unlawful expenditure or loss due to wilful misconduct on the part of councillors. He cannot be in any doubt about the term "wilful misconduct" since the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) who went into great detail about the way in which such matters could or might be interpreted in the courts.

The hon. Member for Garston seeks to remove from section 19 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 the action that can be taken by the auditor and consequently the courts when the money has been spent unlawfully by the council, its officers or its elected members. The auditor applies to the court, and the court can order repayment of all or part of the money. If the sum exceeds £2,000, the court can order any councillor concerned to be disqualified

[Mrs. Angela Rumbold]

for a period at the court's discretion. The Bill would remove from section 19 all penalties for acting in breach of the law. That hardly seems right.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Was it not total double speak by the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) to say that the Labour party policy was to oppose wilful misconduct by councillors at the time to which my hon. Friend has referred, but then to say that it supports the Bill strongly when it removes all penalties for such wilful misconduct?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has pinpointed the problem with the Bill. Opposition Members rightly disapprove of wilful misconduct—one would hope that—but they have failed to understand that the Bill will not help them in their search to prevent councils from committing wilful misconduct.

I was deeply saddened to hear the hon. Member for Garston, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) talk in the most regrettable terms about auditors and, in some senses, make unfounded allegations about their independence and integrity. The auditor's powers are conferred on him by Parliament. As laid down in the code of local government audit practice, the auditor discharges his professional responsibilites entirely independently. The independence of local government auditors is long established. The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) talked about the Clay Cross case. I should like to read from the Denning summing-up about those councillors. It says:

"Here they are, the 11 councillors of Clay Cross. Each of them deliberately broke the solemn promise which he gave when he accepted office as councillor. Each of them have flagrantly defied the law. Each of them is determined to continue to defy it, yet they come to the court and complain that the Secretary of State has acted unlawfully. If he had done so, we would not hesitate to say so. We will not tolerate any abuse of power by the Executive arm of government, but here there is none. These 11 councillors, by their conduct, have presented a grave problem to all concerned in the good government of this country. The Secretary of State is the one person who can take action to see that the law is obeyed. He is the one who must decide which of several courses open is the best one to take."

The same Secretary of State—Anthony Crosland—said in 1975, when he was Secretary of State for the Environment:

"I have no power to intervene with the work of the District Auditor. In no circumstances would I dream of doing so."

The auditor's independence was further reinforced with the establishment of the Audit Commission in 1982. The special status of district auditors has always been recognised by Ministers. The suggestions of political bias in 1927 were rebutted by Neville Chamberlain who was then Minister of Health. He said:

"They are not my auditors. They are entirely independent of me. I have never attempted to give a District Auditor instructions as to what he should do. I have never sought to influence a District Auditor in carrying out his duties. It would not have been any use if I had."

That stance has never been seriously challenged until today when, sadly, hon. Members have talked of district auditors and others who are appointed as independent people as having some flavour of political intent. That is a disgrace, and I hope that no hon. Member is prepared to support such a view.

Nobody is saying that mistakes cannot be made in regard to the advice that councillors or council officers may give. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey mentioned that. It is possible for councillors or council officers innocently or unintentionally to incur unlawful expenditure for the best of motives. It is not unknown for there to be a difference of view between lawyers about what is lawful expenditure. Section 19 of the 1982 Act allows for that position, and repeats earlier safeguards to protect members and officials.

Mr. Benn: There are two questions about the personal qualities of auditors. Can the Minister, from her wide experience, think of any other example in the British legal system where somebody can be punished and fined without a hearing, and may free themselves only by appeal? There is no judicial hearing for a surcharge by an auditor. Could the Minister from her great knowledge give us a parallel for such a procedure, that is, punishment without trial subject only to reprieve after appeal?

Mrs. Rumbold: If the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to listen for a while, he will discover that I shall come to that matter. I have an answer for him.

Under the 1982 Act the court is barred from imposing the sanctions of recovering moneys or disqualification, if the person concerned acted reasonably, or believed that the expenditure was lawful. Under the proposals of the hon. Member for Garston, which his colleagues, including those on the Front Bench, accept, the courts could only declare the expenditure unlawful. That would be the end of the story, making the whole exercise meaningless.

Similarly, the Bill seeks to abolish section 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. Section 20 deals with fraud and misconduct, and, rightly, no hon. Member would wish to be associated with people who commit fraud or are guilty of misconduct. Under the present law the auditor is required to issue a certificate for the amount involved. He, or the body concerned, may seek to recover money fraudulently stolen or lost to the public purse. In the case of loss due to wilful misconduct, disqualification for councillors follows automatically where the sum exceeds £2,000.

We must be clear on what we are discussing. We are talking not merely about a simple mistake, a genuine error, or a misunderstanding, but about deliberate theft or a flagrant breach of a duty by people in a position of trust. It may be reassuring to know that in recent years action under section 20 has rarely had to be employed. That is a great tribute to the thousands of men and women who offer their services as local councillors. When section 20 has been used, most of the cases were cases of fraud. Fraud and corruption are cankers of public life to be rigorously guarded against, and, when encountered, ruthlessly eradicated. By stripping the auditor of that role and his powers, the Bill would, at the same time, destroy a valuable deterrent as well as an effective remedy.

Labour Members have also talked about whether Members of Parliament, who are elected to office, and Ministers should be subjected to the same sort of rigours of surcharge as local councillors. Members of Parliament are elected to make and amend laws, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield said. Ministers are accountable to the House, but councillors are not. Their position is different. Local authorities are statutory organisations and have only the powers which Parliament bestows on them. Local councillors cannot change the law. Only Parliament can do that.

Mr. Wareing: What about the chairmen of health authorities?

Mrs. Rumbold: Chairmen of health authorities cannot change the law either. The courts exist to provide a final ruling, where the law is unclear. Councillors are vulnerable to repayment and disqualification only when they knowingly spend money contrary to the law. That is the essence of the point that I wish to convey to the Opposition. Those who disagree with me are entitled to do so. It is an important point that councillors are vulnerable to payment and disqualification only when they knowingly expend money contrary to the law.

Mr. Wareing: The law is unclear.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is not tremendously unclear. We have discussed Ministers' obligations and duties, which derive more directly from the will of Parliament. It is most difficult to conceive of a circumstance where Ministers wilfully embark on misconduct.

Mr. Heffer: Can the hon. Lady explain where, in relation to Liverpool, money was spent wrongly? The whole point is that they did not spend the money.

Mrs. Rumbold: Many of us have been councillors for years before we came to the House. We should remember that it was generally agreed that to make a rate was the right and proper thing to do by the ratepayers and the people who elected us to serve that local authority. By the delay in making a rate they were acting——

Mr. Heffer: They made a rate.

Mrs. Rumbold: Eventually they made a rate, but the means by which they delayed raises questions.

It is not the Government's role to have a say in the court cases between Liverpool, Lambeth and the district auditors. I have stressed that the auditor is completely independent of Government. As I understand it, the councillors are appealing against the district auditor's decision to issue certificates of surcharge for the loss which he calculates as having been caused by their independent decision to delay in setting a rate. The courts will come to their conclusions; it is not a matter for the Government.

Local authority members are in a unique position. They are elected to comply with the law, which is different from the position of area or district health authority chairmen. Parliament has not given local councillors powers to change the law. It is not unreasonable that an elected member who disregards the law and incurs large sums of unlawful expenditure and is responsible for losses to the authority because of his unreasonable behaviour should be held to account for his actions. Is that unreasonable? Is there an Opposition Member who would suggest that it was?

Mr. Fraser: Come on!

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman says come on, but he is not prepared to answer.

No one asserts that the present system is perfect. However, the Bill would seriously infringe the rights of individuals within the local authorities. During the debate there has been much to hear and learn about the rights and abilities of local councillors to spend money. But we have heard little — perhaps Opposition Members could enlighten me on their views on the matter—about the rights of individuals who live in the local authority areas.

The existence of the recovery and disqualification provisions, which are, as I have said firmly, the powers of last resort, offer protection to the citizen which he or she would not otherwise have. Local authorities are often seen as large, bureaucratic remote organisations which the individual feels powerless to challenge. Indeed, many people who live in local authority areas do not have the faintest idea of the responsibilities of those authorities. People used to ask me when I worked at the GLC what I would do about health matters, but the health authority had nothing to do with the GLC. I received many letters from people asking, "What will you do about our local hospital?" It shows that large, bureaucratic and remote organisations leave the individuals living under their control somewhat powerless.

The auditor provides one of the few means of pursuing a genuine grievance against wrongdoing by those entrusted with civic management. The Bill would effectively destroy that avenue. Although in theory the citizen can turn to the courts for protection as an alternative, in reality few could contemplate such a move. The expense and the risks to the individual are daunting in the extreme, whereas the local authority has all the advantages—financial and organisational—at its disposal. Of course, all that is at the ratepayers' expense.

The auditor is in the business of protecting the individual citizen. He can nip in the bud many of the ridiculous follies that could otherwise so easily end in expensive litigation and its consequences. He is well qualified to demonstrate to an authority the consequences of any ill-judged financial action that it may have in mind. In the first instance, we might expect him to warn the authority of what might happen, possibly by means of a letter. If the authority continues to steer a dangerous course, the next stage is often a report in the public interest. That is exactly what it says. A reasonable authority will take it seriously and put in hand measures to put things right. Only after exhausting all those possibilities would the auditor even contemplate invoking his powers under sections 19 and 20 of the Local Government Act 1982. Those powers are the last resort for the protection of the citizen; they are what the hon. Member for Garston and his colleagues wish to remove.

The fact remains that local authorities cannot act ultra vires, and must act reasonably. They can act only within the law. They have a proper discretion within the powers that Parliament has given to them. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was wrong to say that that was not clear. The discretion can be upset only if the authority takes into account irrelevant matters, fails to take account of relevant matters, or comes to a decision so unreasonable that no reasonable authority could have made it. We have a great deal of evidence of authorities that make unreasonable decisions. Indeed, sadly, in recent years authorities have not merely exceeded reasonableness, but have entered the area of the completely ridiculous.

However, the onus of proof is on the auditor. In the case of wilful misconduct—that is where section 20 of the 1982 Act applies—before the auditor can proceed he must be satisfied that the councillors acted deliberately and knowingly. In practice, that will often amount to acting almost in deliberate defiance of their officers' recommendations. I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was right to say that it is sometimes difficult for officers to give reasonable advice.

[Mrs. Rumbold]

We can see that the auditor does not and cannot lightly launch into such drastic measures. He does so only when all else fails, and in circumstances where the responsible citizen would have every reason to feel aggrieved and where, without the protection of the auditor, the citizen who exercises his democratic right to elect local councillors and Members of Parliament could all too often feel powerless and overwhelmed. It is interesting to note that those who claim to be concerned about the operation of democracy are not in the least bit concerned with protecting the rights of individual citizens.

I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. Member for Norwood when he told the House that the Opposition are prepared to support the Bill. I found that interesting in the light of the way in which the Bill would operate to remove protection from the individual citizen. I found it even more interesting to learn that if his party were ever in Government it would introduce a measure that would not be on all fours with the Bill. Indeed, I must tell the hon. Member for Garston that there might be some significant revisions to his Bill in order to put the Labour party straight.

As the Bill stands, hon. Members and the wider public can be clear today that the Labour party is prepared to accept a Bill which deliberately removes recourse by any citizen—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Indeed, it does. It removes the protection of existing actions that can be carried out by the auditor regarding local council operations. That clear message should go out to the people outside the House.

Mr. John Fraser: May I make it clear that if the Bill were passed unamended it would be open to the district auditor to obtain a declaration that an act was illegal? It would be open to any citizen or the district auditor to obtain an injunction to restrain that conduct and further penalties would follow. To say that the Bill removed all that protection is a travesty of the truth.

Mrs. Rumbold: I would expect the hon. Gentleman

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 0.

Division No. 78] **[2.22 pm**

AYES

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	McWilliam, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Madden, Max
Barron, Kevin	Marek, Dr John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Maynard, Miss Joan
Bidwell, Sydney	Michie, William
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*	Nellist, David
Buchan, Norman	Parry, Robert
Cohen, Harry	Pavitt, Laurie
Crowther, Stan	Pike, Peter
Cunningham, Dr John	Richardson, Ms Jo
Dixon, Donald	Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Dobson, Frank	Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Dubs, Alfred	Sedgemore, Brian
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*	Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Flannery, Martin	Skinner, Dennis
Foster, Derek	Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*	Soley, Clive
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*	Spearing, Nigel
Haynes, Frank	Wareing, Robert
Heffer, Eric S.	Welsh, Michael
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*	Williams, Rt Hon A.
Hughes, Dr Mark *(Durham)*	Winnick, David
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*	
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald	Tellers for the Ayes:
Leighton, Ronald	Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Loyden, Edward	Mr. Bob Clay.
McCartney, Hugh	

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:

Mr. Christopher Chope and

Mr. John Watts.

Whereupon MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative, because it was not supported by the majority prescribed by Standing Order No. 32 (Majority for Closure).*

Private Members' Bills

DRAINAGE RATES (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Sir Gerard Vaughan.]*

Committee on Friday 11 April.

TOBACCO PRODUCTS (ADVERTISING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 18 April.

PENSIONERS' RIGHT TO HEAT, LIGHT AND COMMUNICATIONS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 25 April.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for objections to be made from a sedentary position?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Yes, that is quite in order.

LEASEHOLD REFORM BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, and I therefore cannot put the Question for Second Reading.

STANDING CHARGES (ABOLITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 May.

ABOLITION OF CROWN IMMUNITY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 2 May.

CROWN IMMUNITY BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question —[7th February]—That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading what day?

No day named.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you advise the House of the names of the hon. Members who objected to the Second Reading of the Bill which I tried to introduce, namely, the Pensioners' Right to Heat, Light and Communications Bill? It is important that people in this country know who is objecting to some of these important measures——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This matter is raised on a number of Fridays. It is not necessary for an hon. Member to stand in his place to object. The Chair must carry out the rules.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a way in which to resolve the problem, and which would prevent your being placed in such an invidious position on successive Fridays, when Tory millionaires come to the House masquerading as Whips to stop pensioners obtaining their right to fuel.

We should examine ways and means to deal with this matter through the appropriate Committee, so that anyone who objects to such a Bill must be named in *Hansard*. Will you consider requesting the Committee to deal with the matter?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is up to any Member to approach the Committee, or for any member of the Committee to raise the matter.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many of your predecessors have faced this problem on a Friday. On one occasion the Chair, in reply to an Opposition question, stated, as you have today, that the matter must be pursued through other channels. Do you have any knowledge of the matter having been raised through any other channels? If so, is there any way in which an hon. Member objecting to a private Member's Bill can be required to declare any interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that the matter has been considered by the Committee. In the end, it is a matter for the House. The Chair is governed by the rules of the House. I have no doubt that the exchanges today will have been noted by those who wish to raise the matter again.

Paper Industry

2.39 pm

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rose before the Whip moved the Adjournment.

Several inter-related matters are involved in the previous points of order. Can you tell us to which Committee we should turn to request consideration of matters which, quite properly, are not for you, but which the House clearly wishes to be considered through the appropriate procedure?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is the Procedure Committee, which can then make representations to the House.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I thank the House for giving me the opportunity to raise the question of the current state of the British paper industry. The connection between that industry and my constituency is well known. Bury has a long history in the paper trade, not only in manufacture but with the allied trades that manufacture and design the paper-making machinery, the felt-making trade that assists the rollers in the factories and the general engineering trades that have helped the paper industry for many generations.

I now have only three mills in my constituency but there are more on my doorstep and I am pleased to note the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South, (Mr. Stumberg) who I know will seek to catch your eye later Mr. Deputy Speaker. The mills in my constituency are spread throughout the area and demonstrate the wide spectrum of paper-making in this country. Olives paper mill in Tottington deals with printing and writing paper, James R. Crampsons and Sons in Bury deals with fibre papers, making, among other things, sausage skins and tea bags. Trinity Paper Mills is based in Ramsbottom and deals with corrugated paper and board, sack paper and other similar papers.

It is an appropriate opportunity for me to pay tribute to those who work in the paper and allied trades in Bury who have been through difficult times, but management and work force alike have worked very hard to look forward to a better future. The current climate in the paper industry is rather different from that of 1982, the last time the industry was raised in an Adjournment debate by the then Member for Bury and Radcliffe, Mr. Frank White, who was well known for his good work on behalf of the industry. At that time the industry was in the depths of a crisis which, at its worst, over the period between 1974 and 1984, cost the country 50 mills out of 160 and nearly 30,000 employees out of a total of 70,000. In 1982 the finger was being firmly pointed at the Government and at high energy costs and their disastrous effect on competitiveness throughout the industry. The industry did not disguise the fact that there were other problems but there was no doubt that the energy crisis, in the first period between 1979 and 1982, made a great and lasting impression on the paper industry.

In 1986 things are rather different. It is not my intention to moan on behalf of the paper industry. I seek to do two things. First, I wish to remind the House and the people at large of the achievements of the industry over the past few years. Secondly, I wish to point the way ahead, while asking the Government to take note of those factors which may impair the growth of the industry and over which they may exercise some control.

The achievements of the paper industry over the past two years have been substantial. About £600 million has been invested over the past five years, not only in new machines but for upgrading the existing plant. The price of paper in real terms has fallen with consequent benefits to the consumers. Productivity has increased by nearly 40 per cent.; energy efficiency has improved by 30 per cent.; a new training scheme for process employees has been introduced and management and unions alike are to be congratulated on the new working practices that have been introduced.

Exports as a proportion of the United Kingdom production have increased from 10 per cent. in 1979 to 15·5 per cent. in 1985 — a 50 per cent. increase. Demand and home production are now growing well in nearly all sectors. The Government have also played their part in that recovery. If we chided the Government for their part in the energy price increases in the early part of the decade it is only fair that we offer some words of comfort and thank the Government for some of their achievements since then. There have been certain changes in the common agricultural policy of the European Community to enable industry to obtain starch at world prices. There has been a removal of the national insurance surcharge and, at last, there has been a much needed stability in energy prices, albeit at a higher level than the industry would have hoped. There has been the energy efficiency demonstration projects, supported and financed by the Government, which have had a great benefit on the industry.

I shall turn from the real and substantial achievements of the industry over the past few years and deal with some of the concerns and problems of the industry which I would like the Government to bear in mind. The first is a general issue affecting manufacturing industry — interest rates. Concern about the effect of high interest rates on investment is shared throughout manufacturing industry. The balance is always difficult to achieve but there is no doubt that high interest rates hamper growth and the industry and the Government have a vested interest in seeing interest rates fall as quickly as possible. I urge the Minister to take that matter seriously and I urge his colleagues to look at interest rates as quickly as possible.

Secondly, I wish to deal with the exchange rates. The volatility of exchange rates in recent years has cost any importer or exporter dear. It is not the levels of the currency but the speed at which it fluctuates that has caused a great deal of harm. I can graphically illustrate that with a comment in a letter I have received from one of the mills within my constituency. I quote:

"Just a year ago, the Franc stood at 11·16—a rate at which business could just about be conducted economically. By July, it had risen to 12·28 and this adverse change of 10 per cent. within five months gave no alternative but to withdraw from the French market almost entirely. With hindsight that was a mistake, because on Tuesday last, the rate had declined to 10·28. But who was to know that within seven months that adverse 10 per cent. would turn around into an 8 per cent. advantage? With this new comfort why not then simply re-enter the French market and enjoy it? Because the customer expects continuity and a guarantee that a supplier will remain in a market long-term. How can my constituent give such assurances in such a chaotic situation? Since the Dutchman can; and the German can; my constituent, the industry and the nation are severely disadvantaged."

on

Exchange rates worry James R. Cromptons and Sons which exports nearly 50 per cent. of its production. I appreciate the difficulties that the Government face when they think about joining the European monetary system, but there is no doubt that the Government should think seriously about the benefits of stable exchange rates. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will consider that matter seriously.

The changes made to capital allowances in recent Budgets are a major worry to industry. The three mills in my constituency report a problem. They believe that the phasing out of those allowances can reduce our ability to match the performance of our overseas competitors. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South may also mention that point.

There are two items of special interest to the paper industry. The first relates to the problem of Kraft liner. The EEC has fixed a minimum price for imported Kraft liner to stop dumping. However, that regulation is being widely breached, affecting not just the case material industry in this country and Europe, but, crucially, the EEC's anti-dumping enforcement credibility. The Department of Trade and Industry's anti-dumping unit has given great assistance to the industry, but the Government must continue to press Europe on that issue. If the European Commission is not perceived to be credible in dealing with dumping, the ramifications, not just for the paper industry but other manufacturing industry in this country, will be widespread and profound.

The second problem relating to paper is that of starch. The EEC has a price for starch well above the market rate. That is connected with the common agricultural policy, because starch is a natural product: without starch some paper processes cannot go ahead. My constituents—and in particular the Olives paper mill — face world competition and are at a disadvantage because of the artificially high price of starch. The industry appreciates the efforts that the Government have made to press their European colleagues on that matter but it hopes that my hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues will do even more.

The paper industry's energy problem has lasted for some time. Costs have now stabilised somewhat. The problem is not as serious as it was, although much damage has been done. It is hoped that such damage will not recur. Great credit should go to the paper industry, which has buckled down to the problem and done all it could to increase efficiency. Credit must also go the Department of Energy, which has had a high profile in encouraging efficiency, promoting schemes and providing material assistance.

I must utter a word of caution. With oil prices coming down, with their consequent knock-on effects for manufacturing industry, it would be folly to penalise industry by seeking an increase in taxation to cover lost revenue. The Government should let manufacturing industry reap the rewards of lower costs and increased efficiency. The Department of Trade and Industry should strongly urge the Treasury not to adopt such a policy. It should not seek to penalise manufacturing industry and use lower oil prices to slap on an extra tax. Hard lessons have been learnt by the paper and other industries. It will be a shame if the industry is not allowed to compete properly now. Further assistance with energy costs, by way of help for the electricity high loaders, would be welcome.

My last subject is foreign aid subsidy. The industry has learnt from the European Commission that instances of apparent infringement of articles 92 and 93 in the paper section continue to increase, as member states either grant aid without notification or apply for dispensation on rather flimsy grounds. Either the Government should press the Commission to enforce the regulations more thoroughly or they should be more liberal. The industry is squeezed all ways. It is accused of trying to play cricket when everybody else is playing a different game. For long enough the Department of Trade and Industry has had one arm behind its back in its dealings with those on the continent who try to assist their industries in an artificial and unfair way. It is time for the Department to be more robust.

As for manufacturing industry in general, the demonstration projects of the Department of Energy have enjoyed great success throughout industry. Is it too much to hope that the DTI will seize on that success and produce a new initiative for manufacturing industry?

I hope that my hon. and learned Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will allow me to put to him in writing some ideas on a scheme to promote improvements in manufacturing efficiency and quality. A charge that sits uneasily on the shoulders of this Government, particularly in the north-west of England, is that they do not care about manufacturing industry. It is vital that we should lay this charge to rest. This party and this Government must serve all of our people, not just some. Manufacturing industry must once again feel confidence in us. That confidence is lacking.

The paper and board industry is an object lesson in recovery and initiative. It has done everything that the Government have asked it to do. It should be used by the Government as a model for others. It should not have to weather Government-inspired storms. If the Minister considers my remarks carefully, he will find that the paper and board industry in my constituency and throughout the country has not let him down. It is time that people were able to feel that the Government have changed their attitude towards manufacturing industry. They could do worse than start with the paper and board industry, which has already done so much for the country and which promises, with the benefit of competition and of a fairer wind all round, to do so much more.

2.52 pm

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) for permitting me to make a brief intervention. He has accurately and eloquently set out the facts relating to the paper industry in Britain. He has rightly concentrated upon Bury, a town which both of us have the honour to represent. It can be described as the home of the paper industry in this country. Time does not permit me to deal with all of my hon. Friend's points, but I endorse and support everything that he said.

Within its boundaries my constituency has the old Lancashire mill town of Radcliffe on Trent. Radcliffe has a proud history. At one time its name appeared in the title of the parliamentary constituency. The history of the town is inextricably linked with that of the paper industry. When I knew that I was to make this brief intervention I spoke to the chairman of the East Lancashire Paper Company.

[Mr. David Sumberg]

It is one of the largest mills in Radcliffe. It employs 600 people and recently it celebrated 125 years of paper production.

I asked the chairman what simple message he would give to the Government on behalf of his company and of the paper makers of Radcliffe if he were standing in my place today. He replied instantly, "Tell the Government that we need to invest heavily in modern capital equipment and machinery in order to compete on the world stage. Our foreign competitors are doing it with the benefit of Government subvention and assistance. Either our Government must do the same — I acknowledge the improvements that have taken place in the last few years — or they must enforce fair trading policies on our partners in the EEC." The paper industry in Radcliffe has the tradition, the skills and the will to succeed. I ask my hon. and learned Friend the Minister to give to the paper makers of Radcliffe and elsewhere in Britain the tools with which to do the job.

2.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) on raising the subject of the British paper industry. He represents a constituency in an area that has a concentration of paper and board mills. I know that both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) are closely interested in the fortunes of the industry and wish to see it succeed and prosper. I share that objective.

This is a timely debate because it will help to register publicly that the United Kingdom has a substantial, forward-looking industry well able to meet the needs of customers here and abroad. The industry suffered badly in the recession with many closures of mills and machines, but it has been fighting back and is keen that more customers should fully recognise its capabilities — as many do already.

There are some notable investment projects both by traditional United Kingdom producers and by overseas investors. In my county of Kent, Bowater at Kemsley has recently spent £12·5 million on rebuilding a paper machine and on the latest converting and packing equipment. The company now has an impressive, large, modern facility with which to challenge other European suppliers. In addition, Reed at Aylesford has rebuilt its newsprint machine to improve its efficiency and product quality. Near Aberdeen, Thomas Tait and Sons is investing £20 million to build the largest fine paper machine in the United Kingdom, again equipping the company to compete successfully in Europe. Multi-million pound investment programmes have been carried out by other United Kingdom companies too, including Wiggins Teape, GP-Inveresk and Tullis Russell.

In many mills new computerised process control equipment has helped product quality and efficiency. The industry claims a 39 per cent. increase in output per man since 1979 among the mills making printing and writing paper — which account for over a quarter of the industry's production. The sector of the industry which has seen the most dramatic recovery is newsprint. By 1983 production had fallen to some 80,000 tonnes, or only some 5 per cent. of United Kingdom demand, but the United Kingdom has secured two major inward investment projects.

Consolidated Bathurst of Canada has invested some £50 million to modernise and reopen a mill at Ellesmere Port. United Paper Mills of Finland has invested £130 million to build a new integrated pulp and paper mill at Shotton in North Wales. This new mill was opened by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in December, having been completed ahead of schedule. These are excellent examples of the kind of inward investment that the Government are keen to encourage. The industry can now satisfy about a third of United Kingdom demand for newsprint, and I hope that this capacity will be fully utilised.

Where investment projects have satisfied the relevant criteria, Government assistance has been offered to enable them to go ahead. For example, the Bowater Kemsley project received selective assistance of £1·5 million under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act. Regional selective assistance totalling £6·5 million was offered for the two large newsprint projects at Bridgwater and Shotton. There have been smaller assisted projects too.

A number of companies have undertaken coal firing projects with Government assistance. In some other cases, investment projects have helped to demonstrate innovations in energy efficiency and it has been possible to offer assistance under the energy demonstration scheme. In 1984 the industry is reported to have invested over £6·5 million in energy-related capital projects with an average expected payback of 1·6 years.

The industry is increasingly committed to its energy management monitoring and targeting programme developed in close co-operation with the Department of Energy which has provided financial support. I congratulate the industry on its efforts. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the British Paper and Board Industry Federation, whose staff has done so much to develop the programme and encourage member companies to apply it. In 1984, the industry used 5 per cent. less energy than in 1983 to produce 12 per cent. more paper and board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North has made a number of interesting points in his speech, to which I now turn. He referred to interest rates and the importance of keeping them as low as possible. I am sure that he recognises that interest rates will continue to be held at the lowest rate that is consistent with the need to maintain monetary conditions and keep steady downward pressure on inflation. Inflation would cause far more damage to industry if it were to take hold again. The recent moves on interest rates reflect our determination to ensure that it does not.

I appreciate the significance to the industry of exchange rates, but they are ultimately determined by the underlying competitive strength of our economy and the economies of our trading partners. Greater stability in the exchange markets is clearly desirable, but no country can achieve that single handed. We aim, therefore, to achieve it through co-operation with our major trading partners. An example of that was the agreement of the Group of Five countries last September that orderly depreciation of the dollar was desirable. Since then, the dollar has moved towards a more sustainable level and the pound has declined against the mark, the franc and the yen.

My hon. Friend mentioned membership of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. The Government are ready to join the exchange rate mechanism when we judge that the conditions are right, but the decision must be carefully weighed. Sterling is widely held and traded internationally, and it is subject to different and often opposite strains from currencies that are already in the exchange rate mechanism. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that opinion even in the paper industry is unanimous on this matter.

The changes in capital allowances are in line with the Government's policy of simplifying the tax system and eliminating distortions. The burden of tax administration for companies and Government will be reduced, and companies are encouraged to concentrate on identifying and investing in profitable projects. The changes will reduce overall corporate taxation in the longer term. The effect on individual companies will depend on past investment and profitability and on the availability of unused allowances. Advance notice of the changes has given a secure planning environment. I am aware that the paper federation has already made known the industry's views on capital allowances in its Budget representations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I am sure he will consider them carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North also mentioned alleged dumping of Kraft liner. This is an important matter. I fully appreciate the industry's concern. Officials from my Department have asked representatives of the industry to provide additional information, including evidence of breaches in the minimum import price. The Department would be glad to review the matter with the industry, and I believe that the industry's European association is planning to consult again the EC Commission, which has the main responsibility in these matters.

My hon. Friend mentioned oil and the importance of taking advantage of the fall in price. He also spoke about electricity. Electricity prices for most UK consumers are comparable with those on the Continent. The exception is France, where consumers benefit from extensive low-cost nuclear generation. The level of prices is the responsibility of the electricity industry. The Government set the financial framework for the industry to ensure that it earns a proper return. The Government acknowledge, however, that the largest users face higher prices, and we appreciate the difficulties that that causes. Following extensive discussions in the National Economic Development Organisation and with the industry, the Central Electricity Generating Board and the National Coal Board have been working on proposals which could result in lower prices for the most intensive users, as in the paper industry. The proposals have still to be finalised, but I hope that decisions will not be long delayed.

As for the starch regime, I am pleased to say that considerable progress has been made on the proposals of the European Commission, which are designed to help industrial users of starch in the Community. The Council of Agriculture Ministers will be asked to take a decision on modified proposals at its meeting on 24 February. To a large extent, the proposals meet the desires of the paper and board industry.

I listened to what my hon. Friend said about detailed proposals, which he is to send to the Department, for assistance with various new technologies. My Department is always ready to listen to proposals on that subject. Indeed, support is already given for innovative projects which meet the Department's criteria. The industry has benefited from the relevant scheme. The scheme has been used to assist two projects which are designed to demonstrate to the industry as a whole the benefits of applying new technology. Both are taking place at Thames Board at Purfleet. I am sure that the details are known to those who take a close interest in the industry's future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South raised, in particular, the East Lancashire Paper Mills in his constituency, and I am delighted that he was given the opportunity of referring to them. That company has also been preparing for the future. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), when Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, met company representatives, and encouraged them to keep in touch with the Department. Following the review of regional policy, the mills are now in an assisted area. My officials in the north-west regional office are happy to discuss with the company the question of assistance for any potential future projects.

The industry is too often remembered for its difficulties. It is now aware of the need to spread the message of its successes. An impressive initiative in that direction is the recent publication of a newspaper about companies which make printing and writing paper. The newspaper draws attention to their strengths, and highlights recent developments, especially the large-scale investment for the future which has taken place. I welcome that positive approach, and I know that the industry is considering other possible initiatives.

I hope that between us my hon. Friend and I have said enough to show that paper and board is an industry looking to the future with more confidence and much to offer its customers at home and abroad. I wish it every success.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 February 1986

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Interest Rates

60. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European and American counterparts about the effect of high interest rates on the economies of the developing countries.

Mr. Raison: This is a subject with wide ramifications, which causes the Government serious concern. Ministers are in constant touch with their counterparts about it.

Land Resources Development Centre

63. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many requests the land resources development centre received for project assistance during 1985; and how many had to be declined due to non-availability of staff.

Mr. Raison: The centre received 39 requests for project assistance during 1985, including requests for extensions of existing projects. Thirty-six of these were accepted. Three had to be declined because suitable staff were already committed.

Centre for World Development Education

64. **Mr. Stuart Holland** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to take any measures to offset the financial crisis and possible imminent closure of the centre for world development education.

Mr. Raison: I have already done so by providing a special grant of £25,000 towards a rescue package which will resolve CWDE's immediate problems.

Crown Agents Pensions Division

Mr. Maples asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decision he has reached on the future of the pensions work carried out for the Overseas Development Administration by the Crown Agents pensions division in East Kilbride.

Mr. Raison: I have concluded from a careful study of the issues that this work should be absorbed into the ODA. I believe that we shall achieve the best value for money in handling this substantial but shrinking block of work if we combine the routine administration at present carried out by the Crown Agents with the policy and other work which must remain with the ODA. I have also borne in mind our commitment to maintain a strong ODA presence in East Kilbride. It remains our objective to privatise the main part of the Crown Agents.

HOME DEPARTMENT

West Yorkshire Police

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the West Yorkshire police authority on the question of the level of expenditure for police services in 1986-87; and what response he has made.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A delegation from the West Yorkshire police authority came to meet my right hon. Friend and myself last month to explain the authority's concern about the problems it believed it would face in spending up to the expenditure level of £60·616 million which my right hon. Friend had proposed under the Rates Act 1984. My right hon. Friend is considering the points the authority raised at the meeting. Following representations from the authority, my right hon. Friend redetermined the expenditure level at £63·269 million. More recently the authority has asked him to increase the maximum precept which he had proposed it should be able to make for 1986-87 in order to allow a greater margin for contingencies. We have considered the authority's arguments but have concluded that a higher provision is not justified.

Police (Recruiting)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to introduce a scheme to provide a pre-entry training course for candidates for the police who are otherwise suitable but who do not meet the basic minimum academic standard required for entry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Chief officers of police are responsible for appointing constables, and it is for each chief officer to consider what steps should be taken to secure an adequate number of suitable recruits. At present there is no general shortage of good quality recruits.

Racial Incidents (Metropolitan Police District)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to the answer of 23 January and 16 December 1985, *Official Report*, column *581*, he will now provide figures for the whole of 1985 relating to the numbers of racial incidents in the Metropolitan police district.

Mr. Mellor: I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 10 December 1985, at column *583*. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the provisional number of racial incidents recorded in the Metropolitan police district in the whole of 1985 is 1,935.

Prisoners

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give separately the numbers of prisoners giving as their domicile either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland who have been permitted to return home to the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland on parole for humanitarian reason in 1985.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give separately the numbers of prisoners in British prisons giving as their place of domicile the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; and, separately, how many of these prisoners are serving sentences for terrorist-type offences;

(2) how many prisoners in British prisons who give as their domicile Northern Ireland have been returned to Northern Ireland to serve the whole or part of their sentences in 1985; and how many of these prisoners were serving sentences for terrorist-type offences.

Mr. Mellor: Statistics are not kept centrally of prisoners' place of domicile prior to reception into prison, and this information could be obtained for the whole prison population only at disproportionate cost. The information which is readily available relates to prisoners' place of birth and to terrorist-type prisoners held in category A. At 30 November 1985 there were in England and Wales 640 prisoners who gave as their place of birth as the Republic of Ireland and 321 who gave Northern Ireland. Of these, 11 born in the Republic of Ireland and 30 born in Northern Ireland had been convicted of terrorist-type offences and were held in category A.

Of the four prisoners who were permanently transferred from England and Wales to Northern Ireland in 1985, two were domiciled there prior to reception into prison. Of these two, one is serving a sentence for acts of terrorism. Transfers between Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of improved security co-operation between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, he intends to review policy on the repatriation of prisoners giving as their domicile the Republic of Ireland to the Republic of Ireland in order to complete their prison sentences.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so.

Deaths (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of deaths which have occurred in Great Britain in the latest calendar year connected with present civil unrest in Northern Ireland; and how many of those deaths were caused by action taken by the police and by each of the known paramilitary groups, respectively.

Mr. Mellor: The available information for England and Wales relates to all homicides attributed to acts of terrorism connected with Northern Ireland and is published in table 4.5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1984 (Cmnd. 9621). Five such deaths were recorded in 1984, and provisional information is that there were no such deaths in 1985. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that there were no such deaths in Scotland in 1984 or 1985.

Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the average period between remand and trial for prisoners refused bail and charged with terrorist-type offences in Great Britain in 1985 and the current year to date; and how many prisoners were held in this manner.

Mr. Mellor: The information which is readily available concerning prisoners charged with terrorist-type offences relates to prisoners who are currently in prison custody in England and Wales and in category A. It does not cover prisoners who have been released or downgraded.

In 1985, 11 prisoners were first received in custody charged with terrorist-type offences and placed in category A. As at 16 January 1986 none of the trials of these prisoners has been completed.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts in each of the police areas of Metropolitan London, Dumfries and Galloway and Merseyside have been charged with offences under the Acts or under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts of 1973 and 1978 in 1985.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The available information is shown in the following table. Information on detentions in the three police forces areas specified is published quarterly in Home Office Statistical Bulletins (table 3 of issue 1/86).

Persons detained in 1985 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1984 and subsequent charges:

Police force area	*Detained*	*Charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act*	*Charged under other legislation**
Metropolitan Police district	61	2	8
Merseyside	23	3	2
Dumfries and Galloway	47	3	—
Other areas	135	7	28
Total	266	15	38

* Persons also charged with offences under the Prevention of Terrorism Act are included in the previous column. No person was charged with offences under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1973 and 1978.

Female Prisoners

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average period of custodial remand for female custodial prisoners in England and Wales for the years 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (table 2(g)) of the latest issue for 1984, (Cmnd. 9622). Corresponding figures for 1985 are not yet available.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of custodial sentences of female prisoners in England and Wales in 1985.

Mr. Mellor: Information on the distribution of the length of sentence of females received under sentence is published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (tables 3.3, 3.13, 5.2, 5.9 and 7.1 of the latest issue for 1984) (Cmnd. 9622). The average length of sentence for females received into prison department establishments in England and Wales in 1984 to serve a determinate sentence, excluding those in default of payment of a fine, was about 18 weeks for young offenders and 23 weeks for adults. Information for 1985 is not yet available.

Crossbows

Miss Fookes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ban the sale of crossbows to the general public in the light of information being sent to him by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Drake.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are considering the matter and I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Prisons

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards redesignating prisons in Yorkshire and Humberside and in transferring prisoners.

Mr. Mellor: Hull will change from a dispersal prison to a local prison-remand centre on 22 February. Thorp Arch will change from a remand centre to a category C training prison on 3 March. Some transfer of prisoners has already begun.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current state of industrial relations at her Majesty's prison, Leeds.

Mr. Mellor: There are no particular industrial relations problems at Her Majesty's prison, Leeds, at the present time. Relations between management and the prison service trade union are good.

Mr. Salah Abdessalem Ben Rabha

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Wiltshire as to the cost of providing protection for Mr. Salah Abdessalem Ben Rabha; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the chief constable that the local police merely provided increased cover in the vicinity of this family's home for brief periods when there were several people outside the house.

Foreign Diplomats

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the average *(a)* hourly and *(b)* daily cost per man of providing protection for foreign diplomats; what was the total cost to public funds in 1985 of providing protection to diplomats based in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The average hourly and daily cost per man of providing protection for foreign diplomats cannot be calculated without disproportionate cost; the total cost to public funds in 1985 of providing protection to diplomats based in London is estimated to be about £14·65 million.

Riot Damage Claims (Birmingham)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims have been received under the Riot (Damages) Act in respect of the riot in Birmingham on 9 and 10 September 1985; how many have been met in full or in part; and how much compensation has been paid out.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The West Midlands county council is the relevant compensation authority for claims under the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 arising from the Handsworth disorders. The Home Office is not involved in the processing of claims.

Passports

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *582-3*, he will introduce legislation to provide for a refund, proportionate to the amount of time left to the original expiry date, to be paid to the surviving spouse of a holder of a family passport in the event of it having been rendered invalid by the death of the holder; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: No. The basis on which the family passport is available is clearly indicated in the notes which accompany the application form. Exceptionally, passport offices do excercise discretion however, in issuing without charge a replacement passport where the family passport has not been used and not more than six months have elapsed between issue and death of the holder.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *582-83*, he intends to introduce the new machine readable passport; what he estimates will be the cost of producing a passport of this type; and what he expects will be the relevant scale of fees.

Mr. Waddington: The aim is to introduce the new machine readable passport in 1987; it should cost no more to print and produce than the existing passport, the present cost of which is about £1·40. I cannot anticipate at this stage what the scale of fees will then be.

Firearms (Heathrow)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *486*, if the Zimbabwean bird scarer is the only foreign national authorised to carry a firearm at Heathrow.

Mr. Hurd: I confirm that he is the only person who holds a firearm certificate in connection with the performance of duties at Heathrow. As a Zimbabwean he is a Commonwealth citizen.

GLC Lorry Ban (Policing)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what priority he attaches within the overall policing requirements of London to the enforcement by the Metropolitan police of the Greater London council's lorry ban in London; what resources are currently being devoted to this task; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is for the Commissioner to determine, in the light of other demands on his resources, the amount of attention to be given to the enforcement of a particular aspect of the criminal law at a particular time.

Burglar Alarms

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to seek to provide that keyholders of premises fitted with alarm bells should be obliged to make themselves available at the premises within 20 minutes and that the names of two keyholders to such premises be notified to the police; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have been asked to reply.

The code of practice on noise from audible intruder alarms, issued under the provisions of part III of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, recommends that keyholders of premises with alarm bells should take measures on the lines described by the hon. Member. The code, though not having the force of law, is widely used by local authorities and magistrates' courts in the exercise of their powers under the Act, and I see no need for any change.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

International Organisations (Co-ordination)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what machinery Her Majesty's Government are involved in to ensure co-ordination of the standardisation work of the European Economic Community, the European Free Trade Association, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

Mr. Howard: No formal machinery exists to co-ordinate the standards work of all these bodies, but along with other Government Departments the Department of Trade and Industry fully supports the efforts of the organisations to reduce technical barriers to trade in Europe, and it co-ordinates the Government input to the work.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Butcher: All voluntary bodies grant-aided by my Department accept the need to maintain political impartiality.

Biotechnology

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is now able to make a statement arising from the studies commissioned by his Department's biotechnology unit into the possible impact on the process plant industry of the development of biotechnology.

Mr. Pattie: The studies commissioned by the biotechnology unit indicates that biotechnology will have a significant impact on the process plant industry. By the year 2000 it is estimated that equipment to the value of more than £300 million will be installed in the United Kingdom and more than 10 times that value in the rest of the world. The United Kingdom has the potential skills to become a major supplier of equipment and plant installations for biotechnology. This information has been made available to United Kingdom companies and my Department is encouraging process plant manufacturers to tackle these potential markets vigorously. The Department is giving direct assistance in collaborative projects aimed at pre-competitive research and, with some companies, in specific product developments.

Copyright

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the White Paper on copyright.

Mr. Pattie: The White Paper on copyright law is in its final stages of preparation and I hope that publication will not be long delayed.

Tobacco

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial assistance was given to tobacco companies under the various industry Acts in England, Scotland and Wales, respectively, in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The following assistance has been provided under the Industrial Development Act 1982 (as amended) to tobacco companies in England, Scotland and Wales in the calendar year to 31 December 1985:

REGIONAL SELECTIVE ASSISTANCE

Section 7

Total payments made £225,000. (Scotland £200,000 and Wales £25,000. No payments were made to tobacco companies in England.)

Section 8

No payments made.

NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Payments made £99,000.

The assistance was all in grant form. Details of payments of new regional development grants are confidential between the applicants and the Department. The Department does, however, however, publish quarterly in *British Business* list of companies which have received one or more payments of new RDG, which cumulatively amount to more than £25,000 in the quarter. No such payments have yet been published in respect of the tobacco industry.

Recording Tapes

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will introduce legislation to impose a statutory requirement for the payment of a royalty on the sale of blank tape and at the same time to render lawful recording in the home for non-commercial purposes; and if he will make a statement:

(2) if there has been any change in Government policy towards the imposition of a statutory requirement for the payment of a royalty on the sale of blank tape since the publication of the Green Paper, paragraph 3.2, Cmnd. 9445, "The Recording and Rental of Audio and Video Copyright Material", and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Government are still considering whether or not to introduce a levy for the benefit of copyright owners on the sale of blank recording tape intended for home use. If a levy were to be introduced, recording of copyright material in the home for private purposes would be licensed at the same time. We will announce our conclusions in the White Paper on copyright law which is now in the final stages of preparation.

Voluntary Export Restraint Agreements

Mr. Fallon Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 29 January, the careful scrutiny to which his Department submits voluntary export restraint agreements includes identifiable studies of their effects and costs.

Mr. Howard: The Department's scrutinies of trade restraints cover all relevant factors, including the effects and costs.

Cotton Velvet

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) at what level of imports agreement has been reached for the import of cotton velvet (category 32) from Turkey in the recent voluntary restraint agreement;

(2) on which date a voluntary restraint agreement regarding imports of cotton velvet (category 32) from Turkey was reached.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

CR6 Taxi

Mr. Bendall asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in his discussions with London Taxis International about the future of the CR6 taxi, the company has indicated that it may wish to abandon this project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As my hon. Friend will have seen reported in the press on 29 January, London Taxis International has said that it no longer proposes to produce a CR6 taxi based on the Range Rover design but aims to develop and introduce a new taxi based on the existing FX4. The company states that the new taxi will still have the ability to carry wheelchair-bound passengers. My Department is discussing the implications of this change of plan with LTI.

European Airbus

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about future launching aid for the European Airbus.

Mr. Pattie: On 27 January 1986 the supervisory board of Airbus Industrie approved the first step towards the launch of the new Airbus A330 and A340 programmes. This decision does not, however, constitute a commitment to the development and production of these aircraft.

British Aerospace has indicated that it would expect, in due course, to seek Government launch aid in respect of participation in these programmes.

Gas Appliances

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce safety legislation for gas appliances sold in the United Kingdom; if he plans to introduce separate legislation to cover the sale of gas cookers; how many accidents have occurred in each of the last three years involving uncertified imported gas cookers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

ENERGY

Mersey Barrage

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on future policy towards the proposed Mersey barrage.

Mr. David Hunt: The report on the Mersey barrage has been received by my Department and it is being studied carefully. I will consider seriously any proposals for taking the work forward.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he plans to make public funding available in connection with the proposed Mersey barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has recently received a copy of the Mersey barrage report and is studying it with interest. I understand that further support for the project is being sought in the private and public sector, and I will consider any proposals carefully.

Insulation Work

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to develop the role of voluntary sector based projects in the execution of insulation work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) on 27 January. My Department will continue to support the expansion of this programme in collaboration with the Manpower Services Commission's community programme.

Coal Industry

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list the meetings held by Ministers and his

Department with members of the European Economic Community Commission and the European Coal and Steel Community since January 1985 on the proposed new Community rules for state aids to the coal industry;

(2) what powers he has to stop the introduction of the new European Economic Community Commission rules for state aids to the coal industry.

Mr. David Hunt: The European Commission proposal, COM (85) 525, sets out a new regime to permit the payment of state aids to the coal industry without infringing the ECSC treaty. This replaces the existing decision of 1976.

The United Kingdom has no reason to oppose the introduction of a continuing regime of this kind without which all state aids to the coal industry would become illegal.

My right hon. Friend's objective in the negotiations currently under way in the Council of Ministers is to ensure that the new regime give maximum flexibility to individual member states in the challenging task of creating sound and economically viable coal industries which can compete in the world market.

The proposed regime has been discussed at the following meetings of the European Communities: by Ministers at the Energy Council of 11 November 1985 and by officials at the high level energy group of 29 October 1985 and at the following ECSC working groups:

22 October 1985
26 November 1985
9 December 1985
13/14 January 1986
27/28 January 1986

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has made to the European Economic Community Commission and the European Coal and Steel Community in reply to their new Community energy objectives, in particular the elimination of certain existing types of aids to the British coal industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The proposed new Community energy objectives have been discussed twice by the Council of Energy Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has argued that the new objectives should be seen as markers, not as prescriptive targets. The draft objectives do not propose the elimination of aids to the coal industry.

North Sea Oil

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will now take steps to reduce North sea oil production; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No, and no.

Oil Production Levels

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Energy what formal representations he has received from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries or Saudi Arabia about the level of United Kingdom oil production; and what reply has been given.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: None.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Clinical Academic Staff

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the effect on recruitment and retention of university clinical academic staff of the discrepancies in pay between them and National Health Service staff.

Mr. Walden: The present salary differences between National Health Service hospital doctors and university clinical academic staff reflect the fact that the 1985 pay settlement for the former group was concluded last June, whereas the university settlement has yet to be decided. (Until last June the salaries of both groups were broadly in line). Recruitment and retention of the university staff are unlikely to be affected significantly by the different timing of these settlements.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Dunn: Details of grants made by the Department in 1984-85 under section 17 of the Education (Grant) Regulations 1983 are listed in table 23 of the Department's annual report 1984, a copy of which is in the Library.

In addition, grants were given to the following national associations under section 19 of the regulations:

National Associations	*£000*
National Union of Townswomen's Guilds	12·4
National Federation of Women's Institutes	15·6
National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education	81·0
National Council of YMCAs	10·2
British Theatre Association	13·5
Workers' Educational Association Headquarters	47·0
Educational Centres Association	18·0
National Association of Women's Clubs	27·0
National Housewives' Register	5·2
Pre-Retirement Association	75·0
National Federation of Community Organisations	21·7
British Chess Federation	27·3

The following grants were given towards the headquarters expenditure of national voluntary youth organisations under section 20(1)*(b)* of the regulations:

Organisation	*1984-85*
Anglican Young People's Association	—
Army Cadet Force Association	7,400
Association for Jewish Youth	17,150
Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland	18,200
Boys' Brigade	30,600
British Council of Churches	8,650
British Red Cross Society	8,200
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	18,650
Campaigners	5,300
Catholic Youth Services Council	15,500
Church Lad's Brigade and Church Girls' Brigade	10,150
Church of England Board of Education	34,150
Colony Holidays	—
Concordis	—
Concourse	—
Co-operative Union	1,700
Council for Environmental Conservation	19,300

Organisation	1984-85
Council for Environmental Education	19,300
Council for Nature	—
Covenanters	1,100
Da watul Islam: United Kingdom and Eire	5,250
Discovery Dockland Trust	2,100
Dockland Settlements	—
Drake Fellowship	19,500
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	70,550
Endeavour Training	21,450
Forest Schools Camps	1,250
Foudroyant Trust	6,650
Frontier Youth Trust	3,600
Gingerbread Holidays	1,000
Girl Guides Association	44,400
Girls' Brigade	20,100
Girls' Friendly Society	—
Girls' Venture Corps	22,150
Horse Rangers Association	1,100
Inter-Action Trust	14,900
International Voluntary Service	1,050
Invalid Children's Aid Association	2,000
Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade	5,000
JMB Development Training	3,600
Methodist Association of Youth Clubs	74,800
National Association for Asian Youth	—
National Association for Boys' Clubs	159,600
National Association for Muslim Youth	11,850
National Association of Youth Clubs	265,100
National Elfrida Rathbone Society	19,300
National Federation of 18+ Groups	30,550
National Federation of Gateway Clubs	31,500
National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	69,750
National PHAB	36,500
National Youth Assembly	8,100
National Youth Orchestra	4,150
National Youth Theatre	34,450
Ocean Youth Club	10,300
Outward Bound Trust	13,200
Quaker Home Service	10,850
Reform Synagogues of Great Britain	3,500
Royal Society of the Protection of Birds	2,400
Sail Training Association	4,350
Salvation Army	9,050
Save the Children	1,200
Scout Association	47,100
Sea Cadet Association	13,400
St. John Ambulance	8,800
Task Force	—
Union of Maccabi Association	3,750
United Kingdom Federation of Jazz Bands	4,150
United Reformed Church	29,800
Woodcraft Folk	5,900
Youth Christian Workers	25,150
Young Men's Christian Association	134,550
Young Womens' Christian Association	65,200
Youth Hostels Association	34,000

Tabl 23. Grants to bodies other than local education authorities for educational services under the Educational Services and Research Grant Regulations 1946 (Grant Regulations, No. 4)†*

Organisation	Grant made or approved in 1984-85 £
CRAC/NICEC: conference	1,000
Educational Institute of Design, Craft and Technology	350
Association for All Speech Impaired Children (AFASIC)	10,000
British Association for Early Childhood Education	2,250
British Association for the Advancement of Science: Young Investigators	20,000
British Association Young Scientists	11,000
British ORT Trust	15,000
Centre for Education and Development in Teacher Education	43,220
Centre for European Education: UK National Committee	11,500
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	347,590
Centre for Mathematics Education: Open University	47,600
CGLI Co-ordinating Committee Validating Agricultural Education	40,000
Community Service Voulnteers Schools Advisory Service	24,500
Council for Educational Technology for the United Kingdom‡	699,530
Council for Education in World Citizenship	38,530
Educational Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service	401,320
Educational Disadvantage Projects	31,375
Further Education Unit	3,332,000
International Baccalaureate Office	14,600
Joint Board for the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education	310,000
Molecule Club	5,000
National Association for Gifted Children	5,000
National Bureau for Handicapped Students	15,000
National Committee for Mathematical Contests	100
National Development Programme for Microelectronics in Education (CETUK)‡	5,237,080
National Foundation for Educational Research‡	10,000
Pre-School Playgroups Association	57,700
Project Trident	15,000
Royal Institution: Mathematics Master Classes	5,000
Standing Committee for the Education and Training of Teachers (SCETT)	1,500
Standing Conference on Education for International Understanding	3,000
Standing Conference on Schools Science and Technology	34,900
UK-EEC Education Information Centre (EPIC)	39,000
World Organisation for Early Childhood Education: UK National Committee	750
Mathematical Association: residential workshop	3,000
School Technology Forum	3,500
Centre for Study of Comprehensive Schools	6,500
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)	6,000
Germinations: Art Exhibition	12,400
Polytechnics Central Admissions System (PCAS)	100,000
Leicester University Centre for Training and Development in Social and Moral Education	7,500
Central Register and Clearing House	10,000
Understanding Industry	10,000
London Institute: Annual Statistics Prize-giving	1,500
Association of Teachers of Mathematics	4,060

* These Regulations were superseded by The Education (Grant) Regulations 1983, with effect from 1 April 1983.

† Where the grant included an element of research, as in the case of the bodies marked ‡, the relevant sums are also reported in Appendix I.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dunn: The Department gives no grants to any such agencies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will outline the steps which

his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Dunn: The Department makes grants in the light of the relevant statutory provisions for purposes which are specified to the recipients. The recipients are responsible to the Department for ensuring that the funds concerned are not used improperly. If my hon. Friend has any particular grant in mind, perhaps he would let me know.

Teachers (Dispute)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' strike.

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: I refer my hon. Friends to the statement which I gave today.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about the effect on the education of children of the selective disruptive action targeted on particular constituencies; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: There can be no doubt that disruptive action has adversely affected the education of all the children who have been caught up in it. I deeply regret that. I have no particular evidence on the extent of the damage done to children in targeted areas. I have said many times how much I deplore the attempt by some unions to apply pressure by concentrating disruptive action on areas perceived by them to be politically sensitive.

Examinations (York)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has regarding the proportion of pupils in York taking GCE A-levels, O-levels and certificate of secondary education in each year since 1978; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is not available in the Department for areas smaller than local education authorities.

Foreign Languages

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools in England offer Japanese as a subject;

(2) how many schools in England offer French on the curriculum;

(3) how many schools in England teach Russian.

Mr. Chris Patten: Information is not available centrally on the extent of teaching of Japanese. The 1984 sample survey of secondary school staffing, carried out by this Department, gives information on pupils studying French and Russian in maintained secondary schools in England. Estimates for year groups one to five are as follows. No information on language teaching is available centrally for primary schools.

England Maintained secondary schools, January 1984
Percentages of schools with pupils studying named subject

	French	*Russian*
Year group 1	96	Nil
Year group 2	98	1
Year group 3	99	2
Year group 4	99	2
Year group 5	98	2

Medical Research Council

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the proportion of *(a)* members and *(b)* staff of the Medical Research Council who are active medical practitioners; who advises him on the composition of the Medical Research Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: I understand that as at 1 January 1986 seven members of the Medical Research Council (MRC) and 170 members of MRC's staff were medical practitioners engaged in the clinical care of patients. These figures constitute, respectively, 37 per cent. of the council's membership and 16 per cent. of the scientifically qualified staff.

In appointing members to the council, my right hon. Friend consults those ministerial colleagues principally concerned as well as the council itself; and, in the case of members appointed on account of their qualifications in science, the president of the Royal Society. Such consultation is in accordance with the terms of "Framework for Government Research and Development" (Cmnd. 5046) and of the MRC's charter.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what expert advice his Department offers to the Medical Research Council regarding essential areas for new medical research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: None. It is not the Department's function to offer such advice. It is for the Medical Research Council (MRC) to decide how to apportion the grant-in-aid it receives from the Department's science budget between the various areas of science which it supports, and to take a view on which new areas should be considered essential. However, in advising my right hon. Friend on the allocation of the science budget amongst the research councils and other bodies the Advisory Board for the Research Councils broadly considers, and explores with MRC, the balance of its scientific programmes. There is also continuous liaison at all levels between the MRC and the health departments.

Grants

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of grants given in 1984-85 under the Education Act 1944, section 100(1)*(b)*; to whom these grants were given; and what were the individual sums involved.

Sir Keith Joseph: Details of grants given by the Department in 1984-85 to bodies (other than local education authorities) for educational services, under section 17 of the Education (Grant) Regulations 1983 are listed in table 23 of the Department's annual report 1984,

a copy of which is in the Library. The following grants were also given in 1984-85 under regulations made under the Education Act 1944, section 100(1)*(b)*:

	Grants 1984-85 £000
Special Schools (Capital)	140
Direct Grant Schools (Current and Capital)	250
Music and Ballet Schools (Current and Capital)	2,202
Grant-aided Colleges (Current, Capital and Restructuring Grant)	79,328
Royal College of Art (Current and Capital)	6,098
Cranfield Institute of Technology (Current and Capital)	8,461
British Universities Film and Video Council Ltd.	121
Adult Education:	*£000*
Responsible Bodies	7,879
Residential Colleges	1,299
National Associations	1,746
Trade Union Studies	787
Adult Unemployed	234
British Chess Federation	27
Long Term Residential Colleges Bursaries	1,435

The following grants were given towards the headquarters expenditure of national voluntary youth organisations under section 20(1)*(b)* of the regulations:

Organisation	*1984-85*
Anglican Young People's Association	—
Army Cadet Force Association	7,400
Association for Jewish Youth	17,150
Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland	18,200
Boys' Brigade	30,600
British Council of Churches	8,650
British Red Cross Society	8,200
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	18,650
Campaigners	5,300
Catholic Youth Service Council	15,500
Church Lad's Brigade and Church Girls' Brigade	10,150
Church of England Board of Education	34,150
Colony Holidays	—
Concordia	—
Concourse	—
Co-operative Union	1,700
Council for Environmental Conservation / Council for Environmental Education	19,300
Council for Nature	—
Covenanters	1,100
Da watul Islam: United Kingdom and Eire	5,250
Discovery Dockland Trust	2,100
Dockland Settlements	—
Drake Fellowship	19,500
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	70,550
Endeavour Training	21,450
Forest Schools Camps	1,250
Foudroyant Trust	6,650
Frontier Youth Trust	3,600
Gingerbread Holidays	1,000
Girl Guides Association	44,400
Girls' Brigade	20,100
Girls' Friendly Society	—
Girls' Venture Corps	22,150
Horse Rangers Association	1,100
Inter-Action Trust	14,900
International Voluntary Service	1,050
Invalid Children's Aid Association	2,000
Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade	5,000
JMB Development Training	3,600
Methodist Association of Youth Clubs	74,800
National Association for Asian Youth	—
National Association of Boys' Clubs	159,600
National Association of Muslim Youth	11,850
National Association of Youth Clubs	265,100
National Elfrida Rathbone Society	19,300
National Federation of 18+ Groups	30,550
National Federation of Gateway Clubs	31,500
National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	69,750
National FHAB	36,500
National Youth Assembly	8,100
National Youth Orchestra	4,150
National Youth Theatre	34,450
Ocean Youth Club	10,300
Outward Bound Trust	13,200
Quaker Home Service	10,850
Reform Synagogues of Great Britain	3,500
Royal Society of the Protection of Birds	2,400
Sail Training Association	4,350
Salvation Army	9,050
Save the Children	1,200
Scout Association	47,100
Sea Cadet Association	13,400
St. John Ambulance	8,800
Task Force	—
Union of Maccabi Association	3,750
United Kingdom Federation of Jazz Bands	4,150
United Reformed Church	29,800
Woodcraft Folk	5,900
Young Christian Workers	25,150
Young Men's Christian Association	134,550
Young Womens' Christian Association	65,200
Youth Hostels Association	34,000

Table 23. Grants to bodies other than local education authorities for educational services under the Educational Services and Research Grant Regulations 1946 (Grant Regulations, No. 4)†*

Organisation	*Grant made or approved in 1984-85 £*
Div. 1	
CRAC/NICEC: conference	1,000
Educational Institute of Design, Craft and Technology	350
Association for All Speech Impaired Children (AFASIC)	10,000
British Association for Early Childhood Education	2,250
British Association for the Advancement of Science: Young Investigators	20,000
British Association Young Scientists	11,000
British ORT Trust	15,000
Centre for Education and Development in Teacher Education	43,220
Centre for European Education: UK National Committee	11,500
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	347,590
Centre for Mathematics Education: Open University	47,600
CGLI Co-ordinating Committee Validating Agricultural Education	40,000
Community Service Volunteers Schools Advisory Service	24,500
Council for Educational Technology for the United Kingdom‡	699,530
Council for Education in World Citizenship	38,530
Educational Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service	401,320
Educational Disadvantage Projects	31,375
Further Education Unit	3,332,000
International Baccalaureate Office	14,600
Joint Board for the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education	310,000
Molecule Club	5,000
National Association for Gifted Children	5,000
National Bureau for Handicapped Students	15,000
National Committee for Mathematical Contests	100
National Development Programme for Microelectronics in Education (CETUK)‡	5,237,080
National Foundation for Educational Research‡	10,000
Pre-School Playgroups Association	57,700
Project Trident	15,000
Royal Institution: Mathematics Master Classes	5,000

Organisation	Grant made or approved in 1984-85 £
Standing Committee for the Education and Training of Teachers (SCETT)	1,500
Standing Conference on Education for International Understanding	3,000
Standing Conference on Schools Science and Technology	34,900
UK-EEC Education Information Centre (EPIC)	39,000
World Organisation for Early Childhood Education: UK National Committee	750
Mathematical Association: residential workshop	3,000
School Technology Forum	3,500
Centre for Study of Comprehensive Schools	6,500
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)	6,000
Germinations: Art Exhibition	12,400
Polytechnics Central Admissions System (PCAS)	100,000
Leicester University Centre for Training and Development in Social and Moral Education	7,500
Central Register and Clearing House	10,000
Understanding Industry	10,000
London Institute: Annual Statistics Prize-giving	1,500
Association of Teachers of Mathematics	4,060

* These Regulations were superseded by The Education (Grant) Regulations 1983, with effect from 1 April 1983.

† Where the grant included an element of research, as in the case of the bodies marked ‡, the relevant sums are also reported in Appendix I.

Teachers (Training)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all the institutions in England and Wales which are responsible for the pre-service training of teachers, giving in each case their total capacity and current complement of students in full-time equivalents.

Mr. Walden: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Teachers (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how many teachers the Liverpool education authority is below establishment and as to the distribution between types of schools and individual schools.

Mr. Chris Patten: Levels of teacher staffing are the responsibility of local education authorities, which alone have up-to-date information on posts filled. Pupil-teacher ratios within primary and secondary schools in the Liverpool education authority were 20·6:1 and 15·8:1, respectively, in January 1985. The equivalent figures for England were 22·2:1 and 16·1:1. More detailed information in respect of individual schools could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Teachers (Pay)

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assumptions are made in the White Paper "The Government's Expenditure Plans" for the years 1986-87 to 1988-89 for the likely increase in teachers' salaries.

Sir Keith Joseph: The plans are consistent with moderate increases in both 1985-86 and 1986-87. No planning assumptions have been made for later years, since no decisions have yet been taken about the level of total local authority expenditure after 1986-87.

School Buildings

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received regarding funding for repairs and maintenance of school buildings.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations concerned wholly with this subject. However, last October's report by the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations surveying "The State of Schools in England and Wales" referred to the state of repair and maintenance of schools included in its survey. In addition, resolutions calling for increased funding for repairs and maintenance are among those passed at the 1985 annual conferences of the Council of Local Education Authorities (CLEA) and the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (CASE). Both my right hon. Friend and I receive letters on the subject of repairs and maintenance from time to time.

Students (Parental Contributions)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many parents deemed to be paying parental contributions to student children have nil, one, two or three or more dependent children.

Mr. Walden: My Department does not have information on the number of dependent children of parents liable for a parental contribution.

Teachers (Professional Body)

Mr. Lord asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to seek the formation of a professional, self-regulating body of teachers, along the same lines as the General Medical Council for doctors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: My right hon. Friend has been asked from time to time about his views on the case for a general teaching council, or similar self-regulating body for the profession. He has replied that he would need to be convinced that such proposals commanded wide support and safeguarded the interests of producers and consumers alike, before the Government could consider whether to support the establishment of such a body. That remains the Government's view.

ENVIRONMENT

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the rate support grant is to be reduced by an amount equal to the 20 per cent. rates contribution proposed to be made by recipients of social security benefits.

Mrs. Rumbold: The proposal that all householders who are recipients of social security benefits should pay a minimum contribution to their rates bill is only one of a number of changes to housing benefits put forward in the White Paper "Reform of Social Security: Programme for Action" (Cmnd. 9691). Under the reformed housing benefit scheme, the majority of local authorities' benefit costs will continue to be met by direct subsidy outside the rate support grant, with a proportion of the remainder

being supported by rate support grant. The aggregate of rate support grant will need to be adjusted to take account of the White Paper proposals but at present it is not possible to say by how much.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the order for the transfer of Greater London council staff after abolition will be made.

Mr. Tracey: Very shortly.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 3 June 1985, at column 46, to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: The agencies to which this Department gives grant aid which provide support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the amount of the grant-in-aid that they received from the Department in 1984-85, are as follows:

Agency	*Grant-in-aid £ million*
Countryside Commission	12·967
Development Commission	19·859
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission	49·323
Nature Conservancy Council	18·127
Sports Council	28·603

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Sir George Young: This Department and its sponsored bodies have made it clear that grants cannot be given to voluntary bodies and organisations to use for political purposes. Grants are monitored to confirm that expenditure is confined to the purposes for which the grant was given.

Brixton Recreation Centre

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the financing, management and ownership of Brixton recreation centre after 31 March.

Mr. Tracey: It is the intention that the responsibility for sport and recreation facilities such as the Brixton recreation centre should fall to the boroughs in which they are located.

Derelict Land (Bradford)

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much derelict or under-utilised land there is in the Bradford metropolitan district council area; who owns it; and how much has been disposed of under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

Sir George Young: Information on the total amount of derelict or under-utilised land in the Bradford metropolitan district council area is not available. Separate figures from the 1982 survey of derelict land in England recorded 326 hectares of such land in the district of which 39 hectares were publicly owned. The figures on land disposed of under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 is not available. Unused or under-utilised land held by the public sector is recorded on the Bradford land register set up under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1985. Currently 379 hectares are so registered. To date 102 hectares have been removed from the registers, of which 87 hectares have been sold or leased.

Parish Town Councils

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many parish town councils there are in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: There are about 8,500 parish councils in England and about 780 community councils in Wales. These numbers include councils which have adopted town status.

Plaschem Boards

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will institute a survey into the use of Plaschem boards in the construction of council house dwellings.

Sir George Young: No. I am not aware of any need for the Department to institute such a survey.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the use of Plaschem boards in the building industry; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: A number of representations were received prior to 1977 when the fire research station published a report on its investigations of house fires involving Plaschem ceilings. This concluded that the replacement or underdrawing of plastic ceilings would not lead to greater safety overall. Since that date the Department has received one representation in 1984.

I have seen the hon. Member's letter of 22 January 1986 to the Secretary of State, and I will be replying to the representations shortly.

Anglers (Toxic Lead Shot)

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications of the bans imposed by some water authorities and fishery owners on

the use by anglers of toxic lead shot for his plans to delay legislation on the use of such shot until 1987 at the earliest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government propose to ban the sale and import of most lead for angling in the United Kingdom from 1 January 1987 if the voluntary approach has not worked by the end of the current course fishing season (15 March). The Nature Conservancy Council is monitoring the situation and will report to the Secretary of State on the effectiveness of these voluntary measures, following which a decision will be made on whether it is necessary to proceed with statutory regulations. This decision is a separate matter from any action water authorities may take.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department is monitoring the introduction of anglers' non-toxic lead shot; what information he has on the availability of cheap alternatives to toxic lead shot; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. A number of satisfactory non-toxic alternatives to lead weights for angling are now available. Although these products are not as cheap as lead, they are all reusable.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue a national code of conduct within which water authorities and fishery owners can frame their bylaws in order to establish a uniform national framework on the use of non-toxic lead shot in angling.

Mr. Waldegrave: As part of the package of measures to help protect swans from poisoning by anglers' lead announced by the Government last July, my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales issued a draft model byelaw to aid water authorities in considering whether they wish to propose a ban on the use of anglers' lead in their area.

£1 Project

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many individual donations of £1 he has received under the £1 project organised by Friends of the Earth; and to what purpose the donations thus received will be directed.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of £873 has been received to date. Since most donors have not given their addresses, the money is being sent on to the Friends of the Earth.

Welbeck Land Reclamation Scheme

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received the assurances sought from West Yorkshire county council and Wakefield district council on the Welbeck land reclamation scheme; if he will publish details of the arrangements proposed by the two councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: On 6 August 1985 my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Macfarlane) announced the Government's intention to contribute up to £1·5 million to the Welbeck scheme provided that certain assurances were received regarding financial contributions by other parties, the supply of colliery spoil, responsibility for the long term management of the scheme and a commitment to monitor and report on progress. Satisfactory assurances have been received from the National Coal Board, West Yorkshire county council and Wakefield district council and work on the Welbeck project is under way. The scheme is currently being managed by West Yorkshire county council; on 1 April ownership of the land will pass to Wakefield district council. I understand that discussions on the management of the scheme are currently under way between the various successor authorities and between members of the West Yorkshire waste management joint committee.

"Paying for Local Government"

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what criminal sanctions people will face who fail to register in relation to the community charge he is proposing in "Paying for Local Government", Cmnd. 9714; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: This must be a matter for consultation with local government and other interested parties. We had envisaged that the sanction would be similar to that presently applying for electoral registration purposes.

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, under his proposals in, "Paying for Local Government", the community charge precepted by parish and community councils is envisaged to be precepted in addition to sums precepted by the rating authorities for their own purposes; and if it is envisaged that the community charge payable by persons living within the area of a particular parish will reflect, as regards the parish community charge, solely the charge raised by that parish.

Mr. Waldegrave: We envisage that indivudal community charges would be the sum of the amounts levied by all the local authorities, including any parish council precept.

Urban Programme

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the urban programme for 1986-87 which he announced in the *Official Report*, column *417*, on 27 January, compares with expected expenditure for 1985-86; and if he will express the comparisons on the same cost basis.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

Sports Council

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *468*, what proportion of its total resources the Sports Council devoted to organisations directly concerned with sport for the disabled in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Tracey: Grants from the Sports Council to the British Sports Association for the Disabled and Riding for the Disabled Association represented 0·3 per cent. of the council's total resources in each of the last three years. These were complemented by considerable support to local authorities and other organisations to assist schemes of benefit to the disabled and the community as a whole.

Avon County Council (Grant)

Mr. Michael Cocks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of central Government grant Avon county council will receive in 1986-87; what level of grant will be received in 1985-86; and what are the recommended levels of expenditure in those years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The figures for Avon county council are as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	
Expenditure target	316·8
Latest budget	327·1
Latest block grant entitlement	91·5
1986-87	
RSG Settlement Expenditure assumption (1985-86 budget plus 3·4 per cent.)	338·9
Block grant at this level	85·3

Mr. Michael Cocks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current grant-related expenditure allocation for Avon county council; what is the average grant-related expenditure allocation for all shire counties; and what are the reasons for the difference.

Mrs. Rumbold: Avon county council's GRE for 1986-87 is £341·060 million. This is equivalent to £362·91 per head of population. This compares with an average for all shire counties of £381·77 per head. Avon's GRE per head is slightly below the average mainly in respect of education. Avon has fewer children of school age per head of population than shire counties as a whole.

GLC (Grants)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) why he has not yet given his consent to a grant to the Haringey women's training and educational centre for which the Greater London council applied on 20 November 1985;

(2) why he has not yet given his consent to a grant to the Newham allotments wasteland project for which the Greater London council applied on 20 November 1985;

(3) why he has not yet given his consent to a grant to the Chelsea social club for which the Greater London council applied on 13 November 1985;

(4) why he has not yet given his consent to a grant to the Limehouse Amenity Trust Ltd 12for which the Greater London council applied on 11 November 1985;

(5) why he has not yet given his consent to a grant to the London County bus services riverbus service for which the Greater London council applied on 11 November 1985;

(6) why he has not yet given his consent to an additional £2,800 grant to the Irish In Britain representation group in Camden, for which the Greater London council applied on 20 November 1985.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on Tuesday 21 January at column *141*.

Green Belt (Birmingham-Coventry)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to delay any decision on developments in the green belt in the area between Birmingham and Coventry until a local plan has been agreed for the area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: It is not desirable that decisions on planning applications should be delayed simply because a local plan is in preparation. After 1 April it will be for Solihull and Coventry councils to decide how to carry forward development planning in the area of concern to my hon. Friend, subject to the relevant provisions of planning legislation. A great deal of the area is already confirmed green belt.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* tables showing net rates as a percentage of income assuming the operation of rebates as at present, and on a basis comparable with the tables at figure 9, page 20 and figure 11, page 25 of Cmnd. 9714.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall reply to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, what assumptions about size of households are made in respect of the information given on page 107 of Cmnd. 9714 as to household incomes.

Mr. Waldegrave: No assumptions have been made about household size. The information on page 107 is based on a sample of actual households derived from the family expenditure survey, with income adjusted to reflect differences in household composition, in the way described in paragraph F14.

Local Government Expenditure

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, whether the information given at figure 9, paragraph 3.10 of Cmnd. 9716 "Paying for Local Government" assumes the prior implementation of the proposals in the social security White Paper Cmnd. 9691.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. The detailed assumptions underlying figure 9 are set out in paragraph F.3 (page 103).

Birmingham Airport

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to prevent West Midlands county council from stripping Birmingham airport of its financial reserves immediately prior to abolition.

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to allow Birmingham international airport to retain its reserves intact on abolition of the West Midlands county council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend will make a full statement shortly on the treatment of balances after abolition. He intends to accept the case which has been put to him for allowing Birmingham international airport to retain its reserves. I trust that in the circumstances West Midlands county council will not wish to spend the reserves before abolition.

BNFL (Uranium Discharge)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the circumstances of the discharge of 440 kg of uranium from

British Nuclear Fuels Limited, Sellafield into the Irish sea on 23 January; whether any investigation of the circumstances will be undertaken by Government Departments; and if any additional environmental monitoring is planned following this recent discharge.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on 31 January at column 652. The information available so far suggests no need to extend the existing comprehensive environmental monitoring programme.

Parish Reviews

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which have carried out parish reviews in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am indebted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for the following information. List A is of districts where the council had completed a parish review and made a report to the commission by mid-November. List B is of other districts where the commission understands that a parish review is in progress.

List A

(Districts which had completed one or more parish reviews up to mid-November 1985)

Avon
Northavon
Kingswood
Wansdyke

Bedfordshire
Mid Bedfordshire
South Bedfordshire

Berkshire
Bracknell, Newbury, Wokingham

Buckinghamshire
Aylesbury Vale
South Bucks
Chiltern
Milton Keynes
Wycombe

Cambridgeshire
East Cambridgeshire
Fenland
Huntingdon
Peterborough
South Cambridgeshire

Cheshire
Congleton
Macclesfield
Ellesmere Port and Neston
Warrington, Vale Royal

Cleveland
Middlesbrough
Langbaurgh

Cornwall
Carrick
Kerrier
Penwith
Restormel

Cumbria
Allerdale
Barrow in Furness
South Lakeland

Derbyshire
South Derbyshire
West Derbyshire
Amber Valley
Erewash
Chesterfield
North East Derbyshire

Devon
North Devon
South Hams
West Devon
Teignbridge
Torbay

Dorset
North Dorset
Purbeck
West Dorset

Durham
Chester-le-Street
Darlington
Durham
Easington
Sedgefield
Wear Valley

East Sussex
Lewes

Essex
Braintree
Brentwood
Chelmsford
Colchester
Epping Forest
Rochford
Tendring
Uttlesford

Gloucestershire
Cotswold
Stroud

Greater Manchester
Oldham
Bolton
Trafford

Hampshire
Basingstoke and Deane
East Hampshire
Eastleigh
Hart
Havant
New Forest
Southampton
Test Valley
Winchester

Hereford and Worcester
South Herefordshire
Leominster
Wyre Forest
Redditch
Wychavon
Malvern Hills

Hertfordshire
Dacorum
Hertsmere
North Hertfordshire
Three Rivers
Watford
Welwyn Hatfield

Humberside
Beverley

Boothferry
Cleethorpes
Glanford
Holderness
North Wolds

Isle of Wight
South Wight, Medina

Kent
Ashford
Canterbury
Tonbridge and Malling
Dover
Gravesham
Maidstone
Sevenoaks
Swale
Thanet
Tunbridge Wells

Lancashire
Lancaster
Burnley
Preston
West Lancashire
Blackpool
Fylde

Leicestershire
Blaby
Charnwood
Hinckley and Bosworth
Melton
North West Leicestershire
Oadby and Wigston

Lincolnshire
Boston
North Kesteven
West Lindsey
South Holland

Merseyside
Knowsley
St. Helens
Sefton

Norfolk
Breckland
Great Yarmouth
South Norfolk

Northamptonshire
Northampton
Corby
Wellingborough

Northumberland
Tynedale
Castle Morpeth
Berwick upon Tweed

North Yorkshire
Harrogate
Craven
Ryedale
Selby
Scarborough

Nottinghamshire
Bassetlaw
Broxtowe
Gedling
Newark
Rushcliffe

Oxfordshire
Cherwell
Vale of White Horse
West Oxfordshire

Shropshire
North Shropshire
The Wrekin
Oswestry
South Shropshire
Shrewsbury and Atcham

Somerset
Mendip
Sedgemoor
Taunton and Deane
West Somerset
Yeovil

Staffordshire
South Staffordshire
Newcastle under Lyme
Lichfield

Suffolk
Babergh
Waveney
Mid Suffolk
Suffolk Coastal
Forest Heath

Surrey
Guildford
Mole Valley
Reigate and Banstead
Waverley
Tandridge

Warwickshire
North Warwickshire
Stratford on Avon
Warwick
Rugby

West Midlands
Walsall
Solihull
Dudley
Birmingham

West Sussex
Chichester
Adur
Arun
Horsham

West Yorkshire
Calderdale

Wiltshire
Kennet
Salisbury
North Wiltshire
Thamesdown

List B

(Other districts, where parish reviews were in progress at mid November 1985)

Avon
Bristol

Bedfordshire
North Bedfordshire

Berkshire
Windsor and Maidenhead

Cheshire
Chester
Crewe and Nantwich
Halton

Cumbria

Copeland

Devon
Mid Devon
East Devon
Plymouth

Durham
Derwentside

East Sussex
Rother
Wealden

Essex
Maldon

Gloucestershire
Forest of Dean

Hereford and Worcester
Bromsgrove

Hertfordshire
East Hertfordshire

Lancashire
Pendle
South Ribble
Chorley
Wyre

Leicestershire
Harborough

Lincolnshire
East Lindsey

Norfolk
King's Lynn and West Norfolk
North Norfolk

Northamptonshire
Daventry
Kettering
East Northamptonshire

Oxfordshire
South Oxfordshire

South Yorkshire
Doncaster
Sheffield

Staffordshire
Stafford
Cannock Chase
Staffordshire Moorlands

Suffolk
St. Edmundsbury

West Midlands
Wolverhampton

West Sussex
Mid Sussex

West Yorkshire
Bradford
Kirklees
Wakefield

Wiltshire
West Wiltshire

Liverpool City Council

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with representatives of the Liverpool city council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I met representatives of Liverpool city council on 30 January. I had said I would do so once the council acted legally by making a balanced budget for 1985-86.

I told the councillors that I hoped they were now ready to tackle Liverpool's acknowledged housing and environmental problems in a spirit of partnership. But I warned them not to expect any more cash from the Government. I pointed out that the House had approved the rate support grant report which gives effect to the RSG settlement for 1986-87 for all local authorities. Under the settlement, Liverpool city council could qualify to receive RSG next year approaching £130 million, some £10 million more than in 1985-86.

I made clear to the councillors that they should now use the resources available to them more effectively for the benefit of people in Liverpool.

Housing (Langbaurgh)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *574*, how many WCs were in the Normanby three-bedroomed and the Ormesby two-bedroomed houses, respectively, at the Spencerbeck estate in Langbaurgh (i) before and (ii) after refurbishment.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 January 1986, c. *298*]: I regret that my reply of Wednesday 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *574-76*, was incorrect. This was because of changes to the details of the refurbishment scheme following the approval of urban development grant.

"Ormesby" and "Normanby" are names given by the developer to the refurbished two-bedroomed and three-bedroomed houses. The Ormesby, which has two WCs, is formed either by the conversion of an existing two-bedroomed house or by the conversion of a three-storey, four-bedroomed house to two storeys with two bedrooms. In the case of the former there is a gain of one WC whilst in the latter the number of WCs remains the same. The Normanby house previously had two WCs but, as a result of conversion, will lose one of these in order to provide improved downstairs circulation and more space in the living room.

The details of the internal refurbishment proposed by the developer were not a material factor in the decision to approve urban development grant.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Steel asked the Paymaster General what criteria are used to assess the extent of the success of the youth training scheme.

Mr. Trippier: The aims of YTS are to give young people a better start in work and adult life and to provide a better trained young work force which is more versatile, adaptable and productive. The criteria used to evaluate the success of the scheme are related to these aims and involve

the assessment of the effectiveness of the training programmes, covering such issues as the quality of the training provided and the meeting of specific requirements.

The latest results of the Manpower Services Commission's monitoring show that by the end of October 1985 91 per cent. of the 1985-86 YTS schemes which had then been assessed were regarded as generally effective. The MSC also carries out a regular follow-up survey of trainees, about three months after they have left YTS, to find out what they are then doing and what they think of the training they received. Between April and July 1985 61 per cent. of those who left YTS obtained employment. Eighty per cent. of trainees who responded to the follow-up inquiry have said they found their time on YTS useful.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department does not grant aid to any voluntary bodies or organisations. We do, together with the Manpower Services Commission, make substantial payments to voluntary bodies for running employment and training projects under Government programmes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department gives a grant in aid to the Manpower Services Commission which in turn provides financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations. In 1984-85 the total grant to the commission was £1,436,467,000. The commission paid approximately £415 million to the voluntary sector through the community programme, the voluntary projects programme and the YTS, although the payment in respect of the community programme came from Department of Employment voted funds. There are other payments in addition which cannot readily be qualified.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Paymaster General if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Neither my Department, nor the agencies for which it is responsible, grant-aid any voluntary bodies or organisations. However, payments are made to them in return for services given as sponsors of employment and training programmes. The agreements under which these payments are made usually require sponsors to ensure that their projects and programmes do not involve political activity, or have political objectives that could bring the programme into public controversy or disrepute. We regularly monitor programmes to ensure compliance with the terms of these agreements.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Paymaster General how many people were employed in the tobacco industry in the United Kingdom in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: The Department's employment statistics are produced on a quarterly basis and cannot be expressed in precisely the manner requested. The latest figures for employees in employment in the tobacco industry (activity heading 4290 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification) in Great Britain are to be found in table 1.4 of the labour market data section of the *Employment Gazette* for January 1986, a copy of which is in the Library.

Figures for the United Kingdom are not available.

Flaschem Boards

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many accidents or fires have been reported to the Health and Safety Executive in which Flaschem boards were involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not available.

Tourism

Sir Peter Emery asked the Paymaster General what action he is taking to alter the distribution of Government funds devoted to the promotion of tourism; if he will increase the funds allocated to the south-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Discussions are currently taking place with the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourist Board to decide how the substantial increase in the boards' financial provision for next year will be divided between them and section 4 and how it will be spent. It is our intention to ensure that a substantial part of the money will benefit areas of the country which could attract more tourists and where unemployment is high. We have asked the boards to place particular emphasis on improving job opportunities in tourism and on encouraging greater dispersal of visitors. The needs of the regions including the south-west will be taken fully into account in the preparation and consideration of the boards' budget proposals.

Labour Statistics (Leeds)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Paymaster General when regular statistics of unemployment in individual wards of Leeds city council will be available.

Mr. Lang: The information is available and may be obtained from the House of Commons Library.

Jobcentres

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Paymaster General what is the approximate cost of maintaining jobcentres including the payment of their staff, incidental expenses and other running costs, and how many centres there are in England and Wales.

Mr. Lang: The total cost in 1985-86 of running jobcentres is expected to be about £128 million. Of this £113 million relates to England and Wales, where there are at present 890 jobcentres.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rural Environment

Mr. Key asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to assist farmers and those living in the countryside to improve the rural environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: In conjunction with my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, I am today launching a farm and countryside initiative linked to, and funded through, the Government's community programme run by the Manpower Services Commission. This has the backing of the Development Commission, the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council and the agricultural training board.

The bodies which are our partners in this initiative, together with local authorities and others, are already heavily engaged in rural development and in improving the rural environment, in some cases through the community programme. But much remains to be done. I know that farmers and landowners are particularly concerned about the future of the communities in which they live and I believe that they will be anxious to play a full part in such work.

In addition to providing valuable opportunities for long-term unemployed people, the purpose of this initiative, therefore, is to encourage rural communities to put forward worthwhile projects of benefit to their own areas. If approved, these would be carried out by community programme participants doing work which would not otherwise be undertaken. As with other community programme projects the Government will, within agreed limits, reimburse the project organisers for the wage bill and associated material costs of those employed on projects under this initiative.

The initiative is a co-operative venture. My 19 divisional offices serving country areas throughout England will provide the liaison point for the initiative and will work closely with other rural agencies, in particular with rural community councils and in rural development areas with the rural development programme committees, and with the staff and area manpower boards of the Manpower Services Commission. Those who are interested in putting forward projects under the initiative should get in touch with their local MAFF divisional office.

The National Westminster bank has kindly agreed to offer support for projects under the initiative. Agreement in principle has been reached with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers to operate some joint ventures with us on a pilot basis. I hope that farmers, local firms and individuals will be ready either to put forward projects under the initiative or to provide assistance in the form of materials, equipment and other facilities.

Beekeepers (Intervention Sugar)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why he will not supply sugar from intervention stores to British beekeepers at the same price he makes it available to the Soviet Union.

Mrs. Fenner: There are no intervention stocks in the United Kingdom, or normally in other Member States, although the European Community does export quota sugar on to the world market with the aid of refunds financed primarily by levies on producers. The decision on whether to introduce a scheme to provide reduced price denatured sugar for feeding bees is primarily a matter for the European Commission. Previous schemes have not proved cost-effective; they have resulted in little increase in sugar consumption, high unit administrative costs and created problems for beekeepers because of the denaturing of the sugar required to prevent abuse.

Libya (Wheat Sales)

Mr. Hicks asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, following the United States trade embargo, when and who authorised the sale of wheat to Libya out of intervention stocks, the quantity involved and the price per ton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The quantity and selling price of wheat released from intervention stocks for export is determined weekly by the Commission in consultation with the cereals management committee. Exporters are free to find their own markets and are not required to provide details of destination except in those cases where a particular destination attracts a special export refund. This is not the case for Libya and therefore it is not possible to identify intervention stocks exported to Libya.

East of Scotland College of Agriculture (ADAS)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher) on 28 January, *Official Report*, col *427*, if he will make a further statement on the funding of the proposed Agricultural Development and Advisory Service veterinary presence within the east of Scotland college of agriculture with particular reference to the relationship between the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service and the college, and the overhead costs which may be attributable to the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service presence.

Mr. Jopling: Discussions with the east of Scotland college of agriculture on detailed arrangements have not yet been concluded but annual accommodation and associated overhead costs payable by my Department to the college authorities in respect of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service veterinary unit to be located there are expected to be in the order of some £34,000.

Agricultural Intervention Board

Mr. Grist asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for the relocation of the Agricultural Intervention Board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: None.

TRANSPORT

Rail Closures

12. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what length of railway has been approved for closure to passenger traffic during the last five years.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has given consent to proposals from the British Railways Board to close in all 85 route miles to rail passenger services during the last five years.

Channel Tunnel

13. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when next he intends to meet his French counterpart for further discussion on the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Ridley: I have no such plans at the moment.

14. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on progress on the fixed link project.

Mr. Ridley: A White Paper to be published tomorrow will explain the reasons for the choice of the Channel tunnel group project and chart the way forward to its implementation.

33. **Mrs. Dunwoody** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to safeguard the interests of British Rail Engineering Ltd., in relation to the contracts for new rolling stock arising from the Channel tunnel scheme.

Mr. David Mitchell: The interests of BREL, like those of the remainder of United Kingdom industry, will be best served if it offers equipment that matches the needs of the tunnel operators, or the different national railways. I know that the BRB is already discussing its requirements with industry.

38. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to make available additional resources to British Rail to assist with the financing of cross-London links to connect with the lines leading to the Channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) earlier today.

40. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement on progress on the Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: A White Paper to be published tomorrow will explain the reasons for the choice of the Channel Tunnel Group project and chart the way forward to its implementation.

43. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Transport, following his decision on a fixed Channel link, whether he is satisfied that British Rail will be able to compete successfully against SNCF; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: British Rail and SNCF propose to work in partnership to provide a joint passenger service.

46. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has made any assessment of the infrastructure improvements needed to the transportation system in the north-west of England for that region to take advantage of the proposed Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Channel tunnel will provide easier access to continental markets for industry throughout the United Kingdom. In this connection I do not see any particular problems arising from the infrastructure of the north-west which inhibit the region from benefiting from the Channel tunnel. The transportation needs of the region are, and will continue to be, constantly monitored. The current trunk road investment programme for the region is of the order of £500 million.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Transport if any assessment was carried out by his Department into the public preference for a particular type of fixed link across the Channel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The views of local authorities, other interested bodies and members of the public on the proposals received were invited during the assessment period and were taken fully into account in reaching the decision.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what advice was given to intending developers of the Channel fixed link about the duration of the concession which was being offered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The "Invitation to Promoters" invited promoters to make proposals as to the duration of the concession and to justify them; this matter is now under negotiation with Channel Tunnel Group-France-Manche.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if agreement has been reached between the French and British Governments about the duration of the concession for the rail tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The duration of the concession will be specified in the concession agreement which is being negotiated between the two Governments and the promoters.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what indications were given by the promoters of schemes for a Channel fixed link of the length of concession which would be required to make each of their projects, respectively, profitable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The "Invitation to Promoters" of a Channel fixed link made clear that the Government would respect considerations of commercial and industrial confidentiality in deciding what material supplied by promoters should be made public; it would not be right therefore for the Government to disclose this information.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assurances he has secured from the successful candidate from the fixed link promoters about their availability of finance to complete the project; and what cost of building they have assumed.

Mr. David Mitchell: Channel Tunnel Group-France-Manche provided information about its proposed financing as part of its submission, and it will be for investors to decide whether finance will be available. The construction cost estimated by the Channel Tunnel Group at 1985 prices, including rolling stock for shuttle services, was £2·6 billion.

Cycle Lanes

15. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made on the provision of cycle lanes on roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Steady progress is being made to encourage safer cycling. My right hon. Friend described the position in his reply on 2 December.

County Bus Timetables

16. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any representations on the provision and availability of county bus timetables following deregulation.

Mr. David Mitchell: This subject has been mentioned on several occasions. County councils will still be able to publish county bus timetables if they wish to do so.

Road Safety Schemes

17. **Mr. Stern** asked the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent his Department monitors the effects of road safety schemes instituted by local authorities on the advice of the transport and road research laboratory.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: TRRL has joined local authorities in Bradford, Bristol, Nelson, Reading and Sheffield to design schemes to improve urban safety. Responsibility for their implementation lies with the local highway authority. Technical and statistical monitoring is integral to the schemes, and will be carried out by the TRRL as part of the Department's research programme.

South Wales (Road Access)

18. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek a meeting with representatives of county councils in South Wales to discuss the matter of road access into south Wales.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are not aware of a particular reason to seek such a meeting at the present time.

Concessionary Fares (London)

19. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the arrangements which will be made in 1986-87 for concessionary fares for the elderly and disabled in London.

Mr. Ridley: I understand that the London boroughs have agreed to continue with the existing arrangements for

concessionary travel on British Rail and London Regional Transport services in 1986-87 without resort to the statutory reserve scheme. This shows that, despite much publicity to the contrary, the boroughs without the GLC are quite capable of reaching sensible agreements among themselves which we greatly welcome.

M25

20. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the M25 to be completed.

27. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give his latest estimate of when the Swanley-Sevenoaks section of the M25 will be completed.

Mr. Ridley: I hope the contractor, John Laing Construction Ltd, will have the Swanley-Sevenoaks section ready for me to open on 19 February, some five months early.

The final section, between Micklefield Green and South Mimms is due for completion in November this year.

A127 (Crash Barriers)

21. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received over the last 12 months concerning crash barriers along the A127; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There have been a number, including some from hon. Members. The most recent concerned the tragic death of a schoolboy who was struck as he crossed by means of a gap in the central reserve fencing near Basildon, We are looking urgently at what may be done there to improve safety. There have also been calls for greater lengths of this fencing. In the coming year we shall be completing its provision on the trunk road in Essex and providing a length within the London borough of Havering.

M1 (Speed Limit)

22. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent of the observance of the speed limit at the southern end of the M1; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is for the police to enforce speed limits. In keeping national speed limits under review, the Department has carried out surveys of vehicle speeds in a number of locations. These have not yet included the southern end of the M1.

Docklands Light Railway

23. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the London Docklands Development Corporation covering eastward extension of the docklands light railway.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 December 1985 at column *106*.

My Department has had no further discussions with the London Docklands Development Corporation concerning any eastward extension of the docklands light railway. I understand that LDDC is continuing with preliminary work on the project.

Manchester-Preston-Blackpool Railway Electrification

24. **Mr. Straw** asked the Secretary of State for Transport on what criteria he has based his decision to refuse approval for the electrification of the railway line from Manchester to Preston and Blackpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: As I explained in my letter of 16 January to the chief executive of Lancashire county council, a copy of which I sent the hon. Gentlemen on 17 January, I concluded after studying all the facts that electrification did not in this instance provide the most cost-effective means of obtaining a fast modernised rail service.

Drink-Drive Campaign

25. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the full report on the outcome of his Department's drink-drive campaign over the Christmas period.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Not before the spring.

Rural Bus Routes

8. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the viability of rural bus routes after the implementation of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. David Mitchell: Very few.

A1/M1 Link (Kettering-Brampton)

26. **Mr. William Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects construction work to begin on the A1/M1 link between Kettering and Brampton.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The start of construction depends on the outcome of the public inquiries which ended last June after nine months. The Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport will announce their joint decision when they have been able to consider the inspector's report. This is not expected before June or July. On present expectations, work could start during 1987.

British Rail Engineering Ltd.

28. **Mr. Redmond** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the managing director of British Rail Engineering Ltd., to discuss future capital investment.

Mr. David Mitchell: We have not discussed this matter with the managing director of BREL.

British Rail Rolling Stock

29. **Mr. Harris** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the value of investment in British Rail rolling stock which he has approved in the past 12 months.

Mr. David Mitchell: We have approved £170 million worth of new passenger rolling stock in the past 12 months.

St. Pancras-Sheffield Line

30. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of the British Railways Board, he will raise with him the standards of timekeeping and frequency on trains on the St. Pancras-Sheffield line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The operation of individual services is a matter for British Rail.

Bus Lanes (Inner London)

31. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the operation of the bus lanes in inner London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: That is currently a matter for the GLC. On abolition, individual boroughs will become responsible for bus lanes on roads other than those to be trunked for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be responsible.

Motorways (Driving Standards)

32. **Sir Dudley Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what efforts he is making to seek to improve the standard of driving on motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of Transport issues extensive publicity and advice to motorists on safe driving practice. The next phase of the rolling publicity campaign will be directed at motorway driving. Measures were recently announced to require the fitting of speed governors to coaches. Ultimately safe motorway driving depends on the behaviour of individual motorists.

Motor Insurance Certificates (Display)

34. **Mr. Hannam** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek powers to require motorists to display valid insurance stickers on their vehicles.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. An insurance sticker would not provide conclusive evidence of insurance, where for example policy conditions were breached, and, because motor insurance generally relates to the driver rather than the vehicle, such a system would be open to widespread abuse.

Stansted Airport

35. **Mr. Haselhurst** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what communications he has had with Essex county council about road needs in the area of Stansted airport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The council's chairman wrote on 21 November expressing various concerns arising from the Stansted decision, including the extent and funding of improvements to local roads. My right hon. Friend sent a comprehensive reply on 20 December offering a meeting with the Department.

A46 (Lincoln-Newark)

36. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the A46 Lincoln to Newark road.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Other than bypasses for Lincoln, opened in December 1985, and Newark, which we hope to start building towards the end of 1987, there are no major plans for the A46.

Predicted traffic volumes do not justify upgrading to dual carriageway. Studies have identified some possible long-term improvements which may include widening to provide greater opportunity for overtaking. Sites with accident records will continue to be given priority in determining immediate improvement proposals.

Motorway Charges

37. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to seek to secure the abandonment by France, Spain and other member countries of the European Economic Community of motorway charges.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We continue to press for a joint EC approach on motor taxes and motorway tolls, with a view to eliminating distortion of competition and minimising obstacles to the free passage of traffic. We expect the Commission to put forward new proposals shortly.

Pedestrian Crossings

39. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to amend the criteria for numbers of pedestrians and vehicular traffic which justify the provision of a pedestrian crossing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Departmental advice in this area is currently under review in conjunction with the local highway authority associations.

British Airports Authority (Security)

41. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's guidelines for security at British Airports Authority establishments.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department gives detailed security advice to all United Kingdom airports and to airlines operating in the United Kingdom and directions have been given under the Aviation Security Act 1982 to airports and airlines on the screening of passengers and their baggage and the reconciliation of passengers with their checked-in hold baggage. Special security measures apply to flights subject to a particular threat. United Kingdom security standards comply with the provisions of annex 17 of the Chicago convention and are continuously reviewed in consultation with the aviation industry's representatives on the national aviation security committee.

Public Transport Fares

42. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met representatives of passenger transport executives to discuss public transport fares.

Mr. David Mitchell: I meet representatives of passenger transport executives and their parent authorities from time to time to discuss a number of issues, including public transport fares.

London Country Bus Services Ltd.

44. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the management and employees of London Country Bus Services Ltd. on the opportunities open to them to purchase the company.

Mr. David Mitchell: My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) forwarded to me a letter from one of his constituents who is an employee of London Country Bus Services Limited seeking an early decision on the future structure of the company to enable the management and staff to consider putting forward purchase proposals.

Coal (Traffic Movements)

45. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total tonnage of coal transported by road in 1983; what volume he anticipates will be so moved in the current year; and if he has assessed the effect of such transportation on local communities and roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: An estimated 71 million tonnes of coal and coke were transported by road in Great Britain in 1983. The Department's forecasts of freight movements are not made on the basis of individual years or commodities. Local highway authorities are responsible for assessing the effects of traffic on their roads and taking appropriate action.

South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive

47. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider the transport supplementary grant for the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive joint board.

Mr. David Mitchell: Transport supplementary grant is no longer paid in respect of public transport expenditure. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1985 the South Yorkshire passenger transport joint board and other new authorities will receive block grant under the same terms as local authorities generally.

Drivers' Hours (EC Regulations)

48. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what changes to United Kingdom legislation are planned following the recent amendments to the European Economic Community drivers' hours regulations and tachograph regulations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A consultation paper on the implications for United Kingdom legislation will be issued shortly.

Highway Construction

Mr. Conlan asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much will be spent in each of the next three years on new major highway construction.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The allocation of resources between the various elements of the national roads programme has yet to be finalised. For 1986-87, details will be given in the Supply Estimates to be published in March.

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state, for each industry in public ownership in 1979, the latest annual payment paid to former owners; and, in respect of any such industry which has been privatised, if there is any contribution from public funds for compensation payments to former owners.

Mr. Ridley: No such payments have been made since 1979 in respect of transport industries in public ownership at that time or subsequently privatised.

Motor Cars (Spare Wheels)

Mr. Conlan asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether, in the light of the proposed assessment of wet-grip cornering performance of tyres under the tyre tread depth regulations consultation, he proposes similar tests for skinny non-standard motor car spare wheels;

(2) if he will make a statement on the Council of European Communities' proposed directive relating to tyres for motor vehicles with particular reference to the requirement for the spare wheel contained in the annex to the document;

(3) if he will publish the results of the tests undertaken by the transport and road research laboratory on the use of skinny, non-standard motor car spare wheels.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The European Commission's proposed directive on motor vehicle tyres which was published in 1976 has not been discussed in recent years in the relevant Commission or Council working groups. Any fresh discussion on this proposal would doubtless take account of the recently agreed ECE regulation 64 which specifies safety requirements for the use and fitment of temporary use spare wheels/tyres.

Results of the TRRL tests done in 1980 were not published as they did not form part of a comprehensive test programme. Copies can be made available and I am arranging for the hon. Member to receive them. No further tests of temporary use spare wheels/tyres are planned by the TRRL whose work on wet grip concerning performance has been designed to compare worn tyres with differing amounts of shoulder tread depth.

Child Safety Seats

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by or for his Department into the efficacy of rear-facing child safety seats for use in cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A study in 1984 undertaken for the Department by vehicle safety consultants obtained information about accident experience in other countries and injury criteria relating to rear facing infant carriers. This information was drawn upon in the preparation of British standard, BSAU 202.

Restraints approved to the standard, which is recognised in our regulations, provide a safe and convenient method of transporting babies, whether travelling in the back or front of cars.

A1 (Lighting)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of the A1 from its junction with the M18 to the Dishforth roundabout are *(a)* lit and *(b)* unlit.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Approximately five miles are lit, and about 46 miles unlit.

A1 (Safety Barrier)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of the A1 from its junction with the M18 to the Dishforth roundabout have a central safety barrier.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are about 18 miles of central safety barrier on the A1 from M18 to Dishforth roundabout, including about nine miles on the A1(M).

A642, Leeds

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Transport if following his rejection of the Kirkhamgate to Dishforth road scheme, he is currently considering any alternative schemes to alleviate traffic congestion on the A642 through Woodlesford, Leeds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The A642 is a local authority road and I have no proposals, at present, to relieve traffic problems there. However, I expect soon to announce the terms of reference of a study which will examine traffic problems in and to the east of Leeds.

I shall write to the hon. Member when the terms of reference are decided.

MV Bridgeness

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has yet received the surveyor's report into the circumstances surrounding the grounding of the MV Bridgeness on 16 June 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: Yes. My Department has prepared a report which has been circulated to interested parties. I shall send a copy to the hon. Member.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to set in hand a public inquiry into the route of the Newbury bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I hope to be able this summer to publish draft statutory orders under the Highways Act based on the preferred western route. On this basis a public inquiry could be held early next year.

Aldermaston—Burghfield (Radiation)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what reports have been made to him by airline pilots, including those flying Concorde, of increased radiation in the Aldermaston—Burghfield area of Berkshire.

Mr. Michael Spicer: None.

Agricultural Vehicles (Flashing Lights)

Mr. Lord asked the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations exist governing flashing warning lights on slow moving agricultural vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The road vehicles lighting regulations permit the use of amber flashing warning beacons on vehicles which are incapable of exceeding 25 mph. I shall soon be sending my hon. Friend a full reply to his recent letter.

Taxicard Scheme (London)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many letters his Department has received from residents living in the Greater London council area supporting the present Greater London council taxicard scheme.

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) earlier today.

Motorway Lighting

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the fatal and reported accident rates for lit and unlit sections of the M1 motorway between London and Wakefield from 1979 annually.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 January 1986, c. *330*]: I am now in a position to provide the further information requested.

Accident rates per mile: M1 London to Wakefield (junctions 1 to 4): by severity, daylight/dark and lighting: 1979 to 1981

Daylight

	Fatal	*All accidents*
Lit		
1979	0·06	3·18
1980	0·10	3·42
1981	0·05	3·40
Unlit		
1979	0·03	1·98
1980	0·07	1·91
1981	0·05	1·98

Darkness

	Fatal	*All accidents*
Lit		
1979	0·10	1·74
1980	0·03	1·94
1981	0·08	1·66
Unlit		
1979	0·07	1·05
1980	0·05	0·89
1981	0·06	1·16

All Conditions

	Fatal	*All accidents*
Lit		
1979	0·16	4·92
1980	0·13	5·35
1981	0·13	5·06
Unlit		
1979	0·11	3·02
1980	0·11	2·80
1981	0·11	3·13

All conditions/All hours

	Fatal
1979	3·80
1980	3·80
1981	3·89

Number of accidents

	Fatal	*All accidents*
Lit		
1979	10	305
1980	8	332
1981	8	314
1982	14	416
1983	8	371
1984	20	474
Unlit		
1979	13	369
1980	14	342
1981	13	382
1982	17	359
1983	16	331
1984	10	300

Number of accidents

	Lit	*Unlit*	*Total*
1984	70	114	184
1983	67	117	184
1982	64	120	184
April 1981	62·0	122	
June 1980	62·0	122	
January 1979	62·0	122	

SCOTLAND

Paramilitary Activities

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in Scotland in the latest calendar year as a result of paramilitary activity; and if he will break down the figures specifying whether the paramilitaries were (i) from western Europe, (ii) from Northern Ireland, (iii) from the Republic of Ireland, (iv) from other parts of the world and (v) of unknown origin.

Mr. John MacKay: From available information no such deaths or injuries have been identified in Scotland during 1985.

Female Prisoners

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average length of custodial sentencing of female prisoners in Scotland in 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: Information for 1985 is not yet available. The table provides figures on the average length of sentence of female prisoners received into custody under sentence in 1984.

Receptions	*Number of days*
Adult direct receptions	196
Under 21 direct receptions	117
Fine defaulter receptions	18
All receptions*	86

* Excluding life and other indeterminate sentences.

Tobacco

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in Scotland in the last calendar year for which figures are available on curing people addicted to tobacco smoking; and if he will give a breakdown of this figure.

Mr. Rifkind: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in Scotland on research into cures for tobacco addiction in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: Although the Scottish Home and Health Department and the Scottish Health Education Group are at present funding several research projects directly related to smoking, they are not currently funding any reseach in Scotland specifically related to cures for tobacco addiction. Information about independent research conducted by universities and other bodies is not held centrally.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths were recorded in Scotland from diseases normally associated with tobacco smoking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: In a report published in 1983, the Royal College of Physicians estimated that at least 90 per cent. of deaths from lung cancer, bronchitis and obstructive lung disease are attributable to smoking, and that perhaps 20 per cent. of coronary heart disease deaths are related to smoking.

The table shows the total deaths in Scotland in 1984 from the above causes:

ICD numbers*	*Deaths in Scotland, 1984*	
162	Malignant neoplasm of trachea bronchus and lung (lung cancer)	4,225
490-492	Bronchitis and emphysema (bronchitis)	1,009
496	Chronic airways obstruction, not elsewhere classified (obstructive lung disease)	1,338
410-414	Ischaemic heart disease (coronary heart disease)	18,107

* International Classification of Diseases.

Drugs

Mr. Mackenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in Scotland in the last calendar year for which figures are available on curing people addicted to drug taking; and if he will give a breakdown of the figure.

Mr. Rifkind: This information is not available in the form requested. The cost of treatment provided for drug misusers by the primary care services and general, psychiatric and other hospital services is not separately identified. Grants from central funds totalling £764,120 in the financial year 1985-86 have been made available to statutory and voluntary bodies in Scotland to support 23 projects concerned with the treatment and rehabilitation of drug misusers.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was spent in Scotland on research programmes on drug taking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: Information covering all research projects in this field is not available centrally. My Department has awarded grants totalling over £200,000 to seven current research projects related to drug misuse of which approximately £60,000 will be spent in the current financial year.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths were recorded as due to drug taking in Scotland in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: The most relevant figures are as follows:

ICD Code*		*1984 deaths*
304	Drug dependence	6
305.2—305.9	Non dependent abuse of drugs	—
E850—E858	Accidental poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biologicals	18
E950	Suicide by solid or liquid substances	126
E962	Assault by poisoning	1
E980	Poisoning by solid or liquid substances, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted	71
	Total	222

* International Classification of Diseases

Callender Park College of Education

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what action has been taken to dispose of the land and buildings of the former Callender Park college of education; what is the current position; what revenue has accrued to the Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Because of difficulties in selling the property while it was partially occupied by the Forth Valley Health Board college of nursing, Moray House college of education, as the owners, decided not to proceed with disposal of the property until it could be offered with vacant possession. In light of advice from a firm of estate agents appointed in October 1983, an application for planning permission for private housing was made in January of this year to Falkirk district council prelimary to marketing the site. No revenue has so far accrued to the Government.

Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the timetable for consultation on the recommendations of the report of the Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council; and when he expects to make announcements on the results of the consultations.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Comments on the report have been requested by 27 March 1986, after which decisions on those recommendations which are directed at the Government will be announced as soon as possible.

Colleges of Education

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the current student capacity and complement of each Scottish college of education.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The present data on the capacity of the colleges of education are relatively crude and for that reason work is in hand to develop an improved measure of capacity, reflecting both actual accommodation and the particular requirements of the range of course offered by an individual college. Using present data on net capacity, the position for the 1985-86 academic session is as follows:

College of Education	**Net capacity*	*†Student numbers*
Aberdeen	1,150	435
Craigie	400	224
Dundee	1,500	379
Dunfermline	500	284
Jordanhill	2,600	1,608
Moray House	1,850	1,072
St. Andrew's	900	526

* The net capacity makes due allowance for accommodation which is leased out.

† The student numbers are for pre-service students only; the figures are not yet available for college-based in service students.

Central Educational Institutions

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the Scottish central educational institutions, giving in each case their total capacity and current complement of students in full-time equivalents.

Mr. Allan Stewart: A list of the Scottish central institutions, showing the number of full-time equivalent students in each institution in the 1984-85 academic session is as follows. As noted in the report dated 5 June 1985 by the Comptroller and Auditor General on the Scottish Education Department's control of further education establishments, central institutions are generally operating up to the limits of their capacity. An exception is Leith nautical college where student numbers are declining as a result of measures being taken to rationalise nautical education.

Institution	(Full-time equivalent students)
Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology	3,349
Paisley College of Technology	2,996
Dundee College of Technology	2,075
Leith Nautical College	683
Scottish College of Textiles	641
Glasgow School of Art	1,065
Edinburgh College of Art	1,000
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	995
Queen Margaret College	1,227
Queen's College, Glasgow	850
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	394
Glasgow College of Technology	4,268
Napier College of Commerce and Technology	4,733
Total	24,276

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total acreage of land on which each Scottish college of education is situated.

Mr. Alian Stewart: The information requested is as follows:

College of Education	Acreage
Aberdeen	31·4
Craigie	27·1
Dundee	34·0
Dunfermline	33·0
Jordanhill	88·5
Moray House	42·5
St. Andrew's (Bearsden campus)	24·7

Note: The figures relate to all land owned by the colleges, including those playing fields and residential buildings which are located some distance from the main campus.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what residential accommodation for students is provided by each Scottish college of education; and what percentage this represents of the total student complement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information for the 1985-86 academic session is as follows:

College of Education	Beds Available	*Per cent. of Student Complement
Aberdeen	240	55
Craigie	97	43
Dundee	233	61
Dunfermline	177	62
Jordanhill	170	11
Moray house	311	29
St. Andrew's	252	48

* The student complement reflects pre-service student numbers only; in-service student numbers are not included.

Derelict Land

Mr. Eadie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total acreage of derelict land in Scotland was in (i) 1975 and (ii) 1985, or the latest year for which figures are available; and what total acreage of derelict land within those figures is attributable to coal mining activities.

Mr. Ancram: Comprehensive information is not held centrally on the amount of derelict land in Scotland. My Department is, however, at present conducting an exercise jointly with local authorities to assess what information is available on vacant, derelict and underused land in urban areas and to consider how the disposal of such land hel by public bodies might be facilitated.

Middleton Hall Conference Centre

Mr. Eadie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) in the sale of Middleton hall conference centre, Midlothian, what sum of money from the sale he has decided to retain; what sum of money from the sale he has decided to allocate to the Scottish National Camps Association Limited; and what conditions have been placed on the Scottish National Camps Association Limited by him regarding the future use of this money;

(2) how many formal offers were received for Middleton hall conference centre in Midlothian; who was the purchaser; what was the agreed selling price; and what conditions were imposed on the sale by the purchaser.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I have not imposed any special conditions on the sale of Middleton hall apart from compliance with the rules relating to the sale of property purchased with the with of public funds, amounting in this case to some £220,000. The Government have a right to repayment of this sum and the Scottish National Camps Association has a right to retain the balance without conditions. Detailed questions relating to the sale are the responsibility of the association.

Scottish Examination Board

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct the Scottish Examination Board to desist from destroying any 1985 higher music examination scripts, in order that any remarking will not be frustrated.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This is a matter for the Scottish Examination Board. I understand that the majority of the 1985 examination scripts have been destroyed in accordance with the board's normal procedures. However, those relating to the higher music project option have been retained.

Volunteer Centre, Glasgow

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, following his reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill, on the funding problems experienced by the Volunteer Centre, Glasgow, over the YTS, he will be willing to meet representatives of the centre.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Consideration of the many detailed points put to the Manpower Services Commission by the Glasgow Volunteer Centre continues. I understand that a reply will be issued shortly which might lead to the centre reappraising its currently pessimistic view of the new YTS funding arrangements. As this clarification by officials would appear to be the best course of action, I do not propose to meet representatives of the centre.

AIDS

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's estimate of the number of people in *(a)* Edinburgh, *(b)* Glasgow and *(c)* Scotland as a whole who are infected by the acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus.

Mr. John MacKay: In the present state of knowledge it is not possible to give a reliable estimate of these numbers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he is satisfied that post-mortems will be carried out where necessary in sudden death cases in cases where the acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus has been detected following a blood test.

Mr. John MacKay: Yes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what action is being taken by his Department to prevent the further spread of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus in Scotland amongst those groups who are most at risk.

Mr. John MacKay: Groups known to be at high risk of this disease are being advised of the steps they should take to reduce the risk; and funds amounting to £537,500 have been committed to check the spread of the disease and to support research in this field.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Jury Vetting

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Attorney-General if he has any plans to modify his guidelines on jury checking; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: In July 1980 I issued amended guidelines on jury checks. A copy was placed in the Library. As stated in that document, there are certain exceptional types of cases on public importance for which the provisions as to majority verdicts and the diqualification of jurors may not be sufficient to ensure the proper administration of justice. In such cases it is in the interests both of justice and the public that there should be further safeguards against the possibility of bias and in such cases checks which go beyond the investigation of criminal records may be necessary.

There are two classes of case in which jury checks are now carried out, with my personal authority. Terrorist cases form the first class, and the second comprises cases in which national security is involved and part of the evidence is likely to be heard in camera. In each class of case extra precautions are desirable because of the risk that a juror's political beliefs may be so biased as to reflect the extreme views of a sectarian interest or a pressure group, so as to interfere with his fair assessment of the facts of the case or lead him to exert improper pressure on his fellow jurors.

In national security cases, however, extra precautions may be desirable because of the danger that a juror, either voluntarily or under pressure, may make an improper use of evidence which due to its sensitivity has been given in camera. Where a terrorist offence is being prosecuted the extra checks on records to which I have referred, extending beyond criminal records, are carried out only by police from police special branch records.

In security cases, however, where evidence might have to be given in camera, checks may be made additionally by the security service. In October 1978 guidelines on jury checks were issued by the then Attorney-General, now the right hon. Lord Silkin. While they referred in terms to both the classes of case which I have described, the only procedure which they described was the procedure applicable to cases where there is a risk of bias, that is to say, checking by police special branches. They accordingly might have conveyed the impression that even in Official Secrets Acts cases jury checking was confined to police special branches, whereas it was then additionally done, and was intended to continue to be done, by the security services as well. Having looked into the antecedents of the 1978 guidelines I am quite satisfied that this incomplete impression was given by inadvertence.

In 1980 I decided to narrow the range of cases in which jury checks for bias should be carried out, restricting them to terrorist cases only. (Under the 1978 guidelines they had also embraced certain other cases of serious organised crime.) I issued an amendment of the 1978 guidelines accordingly. The incomplete nature of the description of procedures contained in the original guidelines was, unfortunately, not noticed, and was accordingly re-adopted. From time to time hon. and right hon. Members have since received replies which have reflected it.

When my Department noticed the discrepancy and brought it to my attention, I directed a full examination and I now express to the House my regret that a misleading impression was inadvertently created. I have written to each of the right hon. and hon. Members to whom I have referred correcting the mistake.

As to the future, the procedures which Ministers of successive Administrations since 1974 have agreed to be necessary in the interests of national security must continue. In cases where it may be necessary to disclose in camera information of the highest sensitivity, it is essential that the security service should be able to check that potential jurors are persons who can be trusted with that information.

I therefore propose to review the guidelines at once and to publish a corrected version in the near future.

Duty Solicitor Scheme

Mr. Hayes asked the Attorney-General if he will list those areas not providing cover under the duty solicitor scheme.

The Attorney-General: Detailed returns for the whole country are not yet available. But interim figures show that of the 24 regions only one (London, East) has no 24-hour duty solicitor scheme yet in operation in any area.

Mr. Hayes asked the Attorney-General if he is satisfied with the cover presently provided by the duty solicitor scheme; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The 24-hour duty solicitor scheme has been operating since 1 January and it is too early to make a full assessment. The Law Society reports that a good start has been made, and that there is rapid progress.

European Assembly (Court Action)

53. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Attorney-General what role he and his Department will play in the action being taken by the United Kingdom Government against the European Assembly in the European Court in consequence of the decisions made at the meeting of the European Council on 20 December; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: The Law officers have a supervisory responsibility for the conduct of international legal proceedings to which the United Kingdom is a party. The Attorney-General is therefore taking a close interest in these proceedings and has nominated experienced leading counsel to assist in the preparation of the United Kingdom's case and to appear on behalf of the United Kingdom at the oral hearing.

Northern Ireland Court of Appeal

Mr. McNamara asked the Attorney-General how many cases in 1985 concerning scheduled offences have been referred to the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal; and in how many of these referred cases the original conviction has been quashed and upheld.

The Attorney-General: Records kept by the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland of persons who appealed to the Court of Appeal against conviction and/or sentence in respect of convictions of scheduled offences in 1985 show the position to be as follows:

	Appeals against conviction			*Appeals against sentence*		
	With-drawn	*Dis-missed*	*Upheld*	*With-drawn*	*Dis-missed*	*Upheld*
1985	Nil	5	1	11	23	29

In one case not enumerated above, on an appeal against conviction, the appeal was upheld in relation to a number of counts and dismissed in relation to the remaining counts.

Legal Aid Review Team

Mr. John Fraser asked the Attorney-General what arrangements the legal aid review team has made to accept evidence and representations from non-Government organisations; and to whom they should be addressed.

The Attorney-General: The team intends to consult a wide range of individuals and organisations involved in the provision of legal services. It will also be pleased to receive written representations, which should be sent to the team at the Lord Chancellor's Department, Room 460, Thames House North, Millbank, London SW1.

Law Officers (Correspondence)

Mr. Dobson asked the Attorney-General what is the practice of the Law Officers when writing to Cabinet Ministers regarding references to other Cabinet Ministers with whom they have already discussed the matter to which the letter relates; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: There is no set practice in this matter. The contents of each letter are determined by the circumstances of the particular case.

Westland plc

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General, pursuant to the answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *357*, on what evidence he based his conclusion that there was no possibility that proceedings would be instituted against Ms. Colette Bowe in relation to disclosure of extracts from the letter from the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I was satisfied by what the head of the Civil Service was able to tell me that there was no reason to doubt that Ms. Bowe had acted in complete good faith.

Mr. Dobson asked the Attorney-General on what day, at what time and in what form the Solicitor-General first saw a copy of the then Secretary of State for Defence's letter of Friday 3 January to Lloyds merchant bank.

The Attorney-General: In *The Times* on 4 January in the evening when it was drawn to his attention by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Attorney-General for what purpose, and at what time, the Solicitor-General requested the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to supply the documents referred to in his letter of 7 January as having been supplied on 3 January; and if he will now place those documents in the public domain.

The Attorney-General: The documents referred to in my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General's letter of 7 January were in fact supplied to him at his request by the then Secretary of State for Defence on 31 December 1985 for the purpose of enabling the Solicitor-General to advise on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to Sir John Cuckney. The reference in my hon. and learned Friend's letter to the Secretary of State for Defence of 6 January to the fact that specified documents were available to him when he gave advice on 31 December to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister relates to this occasion. The date of 3 January was inserted in error in the letter of 7 January. The documents were disclosed to my hon. and learned Friend for the purposes of giving legal advice. I am therefore not prepared to place them in the public domain.

DEFENCE

Porton Down (Animal Research)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what research is being carried out at Porton Down on exposure of animals to cyanide and hydrogen gases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: No research is being carried out at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down, involving the exposure of animals to cyanide and hydrogen as gases. The chemical defence programme is concerned with establishing the toxicity of potential chemical agents which might be used against United Kingdom forces and the efficiency and safety of defensive measures. In this context experiments have been undertaken to improve understanding of the toxicology of cyanide poisoning and with a view to improving treatment.

Ministry Housing

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many houses or flats are owned by his Department in Shoeburyness; and how many of these are required for the housing of Ministry of Defence personnel;

(2) if he will offer for sale, at discounted prices comparable to local authority dwellings, those houses occupied by Ministry of Defence personnel made

redundant in consequence of contractorisation who are taking up employment with the new private contractors; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what plans he has for the disposal of surplus residential properties owned by his Department in Shoeburyness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Ministry of Defence owns 226 dwellings in the Shoeburyness area, 137 of which are occupied by military personnel or civilian employees, 99 of whom are employed at the proof and experimental establishment, Shoeburyness. There are no plans at present to dispose of any of these properties but should any of them become available for sale, tenants would be given the opportunity to buy under a discount scheme comparable to that of a local authority.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Ministry of Defence personnel employed by the proof and experimental establishment, Shoeburyness, reside in houses owned by his Department; how many of these persons are being made redundant by his Department in consequence of contractorisation; and how many have been issued with notices to quit their homes;

(2) why he will not permit those employees made redundant by his contractorisation proposals for Shoeburyness proof and experimental establishment, who are to be employed by the new contractor, to continue as tenants of his Department; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many former employees of his Department are being made homeless in consequence of the contracting out of certain services at the Proof and Experimental Establishment at Shoeburyness, Essex; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Ninety-nine military and civilian personnel employed at the proof and experimental establishment presently reside in Ministry of Defence owned houses. Of these, 14 civilian employees will be made redundant when the first phase of the contractorisation of the establishment takes place. Only one of these employees has received a notice to quit. He is occupying an Army married quarter and under normal military procedures would be expected to vacate the house when his MOD employment ended. The notice to quit has been withdrawn whilst his accommodation needs are sympathetically reviewed in the light of his future employment intentions.

Skynet IV Satellites

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence when each of the three Skynet IV satellites now ordered are expected to be launched.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Skynet 4A and 4B were expected to be launched on 24 June 1986 and in January 1987, respectively. No information is available about the extent of any delays that might arise as a result of the accident involving the United States shuttle "Challenger" on 28 January 1986. Skynet 4C is expected to be launched in late 1988 or early 1989.

Mr. McNamara asked Secretary of State for Defence what is the operational requirement for each Skynet IV satellite.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The operational requirement for all Skynet 4 satellites is to provide long range military communications for the armed forces.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to order further Skynet IV or other military satellites.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Long term plans include provision for two further Skynet 4 satellites.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of the third Skynet satellite ordered from British Aerospace in May 1985.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 26 November 1985 at column *564*.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the expected launch costs of each Skynet IV satellite.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It would not be appropriate to disclose this information as it could prejudice negotiations for the launch of Skynet 4C.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether it has yet been determined how each Skynet IV satellite will be launched.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Skynet 4A and 4B will be launched via the United States space transportation system, the shuttle. No decision has been made on the launcher for Skynet 4C.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given by his Department to using the European Ariane launcher system for any Skynet IV launch.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Full consideration was given to using the European Ariane launcher system for Skynet 4A and 4B, and is currently being given to its possible use for Skynet 4C.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether a British payload specialist will t accompany all Skynet IV launches by space shuttle.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Current plans are that a British payload specialist will accompany the launch of both Skynet 4A and 4B by the United States space shuttle. No decision has been taken about British payload specialists accompanying any further Skynet IV satellites that may be launched by the shuttle.

Space (Payload Specialists)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what additional costs are associated with the training of and launching into space of each British payload specialist.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The additional cost to the United Kingdom of training each British payload specialist is approximately £100,000. There is no additional cost for launching the payload specialist into space.

Small Arms (Contracts)

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he has any plans to award contracts to British industries for the production of small arms after 1 April; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his policy towards the awarding of small arms contracts to foreign manufacturers.

Mr. Lee: Our policy towards the awarding of contracts to foreign manufacturers remains as set out in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's answer of 13 January 1986 at column 517.

Future small arms purchases will be made in accordance with that policy.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the size, number and names of foreign manufacturers which have been awarded small arms contracts in 1978-79, 1980-81 and 1985-86.

Mr. Lee: In the period since 1978-79 no significant purchases of foreign small arms have been made by the MOD. Quantities of 9 mm pistols have been bought from Fabrique Nationale in Belgium. There is currently no United Kingdom manufacturer of this type of automatic pistol. During that period limited quantities of other foreign small arms have been purchased for specialist uses. For security reasons I am not prepared to give details of these other weapons.

HMS Nelson (Wardroom)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated completion cost of the refurbishment of the wardroom at HMS Nelson Portsmouth; and what was the original estimate.

Mr. Lee: The estimated completion cost of the wardroom refurbishment in HMS Nelson is £2·8 million, including VAT. The original 1984 estimate of £2·2 million, exluded VAT and was at the then current price levels.

Naval Houses

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many empty naval houses there are in Fareham; (2) how many empty naval houses there are in Gosport.

Mr. Lee: The Navy currently has approximately 500 vacant quarters in the Gosport/Fareham area.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many naval owned houses in Portsmouth are currently empty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Navy currently has approximately 150 vacant married quarters in Portsmouth.

Royal Navy (Manpower)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers and men have given notice to leave the Royal Navy in the last three years, by rank and year.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of officers and men who have given notice to leave the Royal Navy in the last three financial years, together with the numbers for the current year so far, are as follows:

	Officers	*Ratings*	*Total*
1982-83	145	1,861	2,006
1983-84	165	2,459	2,624
1984-85	190	3,016	3,206
April-December 1985	131	2,982	3,113

These figures exclude ratings with less than six months of service who exercise their statutory right to leave.

It is not possible to provide the greater detail requested without disproportionate time and effort.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been recruited into the Royal Navy in each of the last three years.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of recruits into the Royal Navy from civilian life during the last three financial years, together with the numbers for the current year so far, are as follows:

	Officers	*Ratings*	*Total*
1982-83	395	2,683	3,078
1983-84	445	3,778	4,223
1984-85	537	3,694	4,241
April-December 1985	422	2,145	2,567

The numbers of officers exclude promotion from the ranks.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many applicants there were to join the Royal Navy in each of the last three years.

Mr. Lee: The numbers of applicants to enlist in the Royal Navy during the last three financial years, together with the numbers for the current financial year so far, are as follows:

	Officers	*Ratings*	*Total*
1982-83	1,055	19,668	20,723
1983-84	1,517	18,034	29,551
1984-85	1,514	15,889	17,403
April-December 1985	1,189	9,244	10,433

Helicopters

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to military helicopter types being exported by Westland plc when that helicopter was not also part of the inventory of the British services.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 January 1986, c. *336*]: I understand that Westland plc has not exported any military helicopters other than types in service with the British armed forces. Of course, there have been variations to the types in United Kingdom service in order to suit particular export customer preferences for equipment fit and specification.

Nimrod

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence what sums have been provided to date from public funds for the Nimrod project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 January 1986, c. *448*]: By 30 November 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, some £882 million at 1985-86 average outturn prices had been spent or committed on the Nimrod Mk3 airborne early warning project.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical steps have been taken recently by Her Majesty's Government to enhance nuclear disarmament and to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Renton: We attach the highest priority to a successful outcome to the US/Soviet talks at Geneva. We support the US negotiating positions and continue to play an active part in the Alliance consultations which contribute to their formulation. We now want to see serious negotiations to achieve the agreed objectives for Geneva.

Meanwhile, as a further contribution to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we have recently undertaken a new round of diplomatic action to persuade states which are not parties to the non-proliferation treaty to adhere to it. This campaign has been co-ordinated with one conducted by the Soviet Union.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisatons assisted by his Department with grant in aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Eggar: Details of grants made by the two wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to voluntary bodies and organisations are listed in Class II, Vote 1, section G, and Class II, Vote 7, section D, of the 1985-86 Supply Estimates.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The only non-departmental public body in receipt of grant aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which provides financial support for voluntary bodies is the British Council, which in 1985-86 received a grant-in-aid of £83,962,000.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Eggar: Grants are given only to voluntary bodies and organisations whose purposes are strictly in accordance with our foreign and overseas aid policies. All such grants are subject to review. Those in receipt of grants are required to provide audited accounts.

Immigration

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether medical officers at embassies and consulates which deal with entry clearance and quota voucher applications are supplied with a list of medical conditions which are regarded as sufficiently serious to delay or vitiate such applications.

Mr. Eggar: Yes. However, medical referees have no authority to refuse or defer an application on medical grounds. That responsibility rests with the entry clearance officer (or his superior) who may take medical evidence into account in arriving at their decision.

Returning residents, spouses and children under 18 of people settled in the United Kingdom may not be refused on medical grounds.

East Timor

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has consulted the Secretary General of the United Nations over United Nations resolution 37/30 concerning East Timor.

Mr. Renton: No. But there is contact at official level and we continue to follow developments on East Timor closely. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) told the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 28 October 1985, at column *359*, we support the efforts of the UN Secretary General to promote contacts between the Indonesian and Portuguese Governments aimed at achieving a just settlement in East Timor.

Israeli Prime Minister (Meeting)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend's discussions with Mr. Peres were useful and constructive. They focused on efforts to move towards middle east peace negotiations and on conditions in the occupied territories. He reviewed briefly other regional and bilateral issues.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *368*, to the right hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, South, on what date he intends to publish the information in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Eggar: Pursuant to my reply of 27 January, the information requested by the right hon. Member has now been assembled. Fifty two judgments against signatory nations have so far been given by the European Court of Human Rights. Thirteen cases are pending before the Committee of Ministers. Resolutions have been passed in 34 of the 39 other cases. In view of their length, I am arranging to place the text of these resolutions in the Library of the House. The remaining five cases were all dealt with by the Committee of Ministers before the adoption in 1976 of the rules which provide that their decisions on judgment by the court be embodied in resolutions. In these cases, the committee, after satisfying itself that the Government involved had executed the judgment, "took note" of this action.

EC Foreign Ministers (Meeting)

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who it is intended will meet the Community Foreign Ministers in Lusaka on 2 to 4 February; and if any contacts will be made with members of the African National Congress while they are in Lusaka.

Mrs. Chalker: Ministers of the Twelve European Community countries are currently in Lusaka for discussions with the Foreign Ministers, of the six front-line states. The Dutch Foreign Minister as the president, met representatives of the ANC in Lusaka on 2 February.

Organisations (Funding)

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to alter the existing system of funding through Foreign Office votes of organisations such as the British Council.

Mr. Eggar: We have no such plans.

European Act

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reference is made to European union in the European Act adopted by the intergovernmental conference.

Mrs. Chalker: References to European union are made in the preamble to the single European Act in the context of the Stuttgart solemn declaration, which identified European union as a process of deepening and broadening existing European activities. Neither the title of the Act nor its operative clauses refer to union.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects copies of the English text of the European Act to be available to hon. Members.

Mrs. Chalker: Copies of the text were placed in the Library and Vote Office on 30 January.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why he has withdrawn the reserve on the European Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made to the House on 30 January at column 1106.

European Community Budget

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arguments have been put forward to Her Majesty's Government by the European Commission to justify its adoption of a budget as amended by the European Assembly, against the decision of the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Brooke: I have been asked to reply.

Article 203 of the treaty lays down that the budget is formally adopted by the president of the European Parliament. Article 205 states that the Commision is then responsible for its implementation. The Council of Ministers has decided to challenge the Parliament before the European Court, for adopting the 1986 budget on the grounds that it contains unauthorised increases in expenditure. The United Kingdom and certain other member states are mounting separate national actions against the adoption of the budget.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Commodity Prices

Mr. Best asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the fall in commodity prices for the last 12 months for which figures are available; if he will state the level of effect this has had on inflation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: In the middle of January 1986 the *Economist* (all items) index of commodity prices (which excludes oil) was 9 per cent. lower when measured in SDR's than a year previously but 2 per cent. higher when measured in dollars. Over the same period dollar prices of North sea oil fell by 25 per cent.

Lower inflation in the world economy clearly contributes to the reduction of domestic inflation but it is not possible to isolate the precise contribution.

Betting Duty

Mr. Garrett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue from *(a)* the off-course betting duty and *(b)* the on-course betting duty in the last year for which figures are available; and if he can split the figure between horse and greyhound racing.

Mr. Brooke: The revenue raised from the general betting duty in 1984-85 was as follows:

	£ thousand
Off-course	274,596
On-course*	18,451

* Includes totalisators

I regret that it is not possible to identify separately the revenue from horse and greyhound racing.

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current annual revenue from taxes on *(a)* on-course and *(b)* off-course betting; what is the cost of collecting these taxes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Details of the revenue raised in 1984-85 were given in my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett).

Precise figures of costs relating to individual duties are not available but the cost of administering the betting and gaming duties as a whole in 1984-85 amounted to £6·4 million, or approximately 1 per cent. of the revenue raised.

Meetings

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the regular meetings which he expects to attend or be represented in 1986 of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Development Agency, the International Finance Company and the Commonwealth Finance Ministers of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Lawson: I expect to attend, or be represented at, the following meetings during 1986:

The IMF Interim Committee and Development Committee of the IMF and World Bank 9-11 April
European Investment Bank Board of Governors 16 June
The Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting 23/24 September
The IMF Interim Committee and Development Committee of the IMF and World Bank Late September
The Annual Meetings of the IMF/IBRD/IDA/IFC 30 September—3 October
Economic and Finance Council Meetings of the EEC (ECOFIN)
17 February
10 March
28 April
26 May
16 June
7 July
13 October
17 November
8 December

Informal ECOFIN Meetings
4/6 April
19/20 September

Tobacco Tax

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised from tobacco taxes in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Brooke: It is estimated that £5,240 million was raised in 1985 from the excise duties and value added tax on tobacco products.

Contracted-out Services

Mr. Canavan asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will state, for services for which each Government Department is responsible, the expenditure on contracted-out services in *(a)* catering, *(b)* laundry, *(c)* security guarding, *(d)* cleaning, *(e)* general maintenance and *(f)* other services; and if he will express that expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure on each service.

Mr. MacGregor: The table shows total expenditure of Government Departments in 1984-85. Comparable information for "other services" cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Estimated costs (1984-85)

	(1) Total £ million	*(2) Contracted out £ million*	*(3) (2) as per cent. of (1)*
Service			
Catering—Home Office			
Prison Dept and MOD	108·0	4·5	4·2
Other depts	6·9	4·5	65·2
Cleaning	69·2	58·4	84·4
Laundry	11·3	8·3	73·5
Maintenance	116·1	94·9	81·7
Security Guarding	66·5	5·0	7·5
Totals	*378·0	*175·7	46·5

* Totals are not the exact sums of component items due to rounding.

Free Zone Steering Committee

Mr. Lambie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the composition of the free zone steering committee; and how often it has met.

Mr. MacGregor: The committee comprises of officials from Departments concerned with the freeport experiment, under Treasury chairmanship. It has met twice to review the progress of a five-year research study of the six freeport experiments being conducted by Roger Tym and Partners, which was announced in July 1984, at column 448.

Mr. Lambie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the free zone operators, or their association, have been invited to participate in the free zone steering committee.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government Departments represented on the committee have responded to views put forward by the operators and their representatives on a number of occasions, and are willing to consider any further approaches that are made. It would not be appropriate for the operators or their associations to participate in the deliberations of the committee.

Crown Estate Commissioners

Mr. Body asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the policy of the Crown Estate Commissioners towards the residence of their agricultural tenants on the holdings let to them.

Mr. MacGregor: The policy of the Crown Estate Commissioners is that a tenant should reside on his agricultural holding if a suitable house exists on it.

European Court Budget

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *197*, if the Government have yet applied to the European Court for suspension of implementation by the Commission of the disputed elements in the budget pending substantive judgment by the court; what estimate he has made of the duration of the legal proceedings at the European Court in making financial provisions for additional payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

North Sea Oil (Revenue)

Mr. Bruce asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the expected total annual revenues to the Exchequer from United Kingdom North sea oil production at the following market prices *(a)* $18, *(b)* $15, *(c)* $12 and *(d)* $10.

Mr. Moore: The effects on oil revenues—still more on total revenues—of assuming different oil prices are subject to wide margins of error. A sustained change from current levels of about $1 a barrel, on the assumption of no change in the exchange rate, would lead to a change in North sea revenue of about £½ billion in a full year. The effects of a larger change would depend on a wide range of factors difficult to quantify, such as expectations of future oil prices and hence oil companies' exploration and investment decisions.

Lodging Allowances

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the regulations governing exemption from tax on lodging allowances; what has been the nature of such representations; what plans he has to amend the regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Charities (VAT)

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those organisations which have made representations to him since his last budget calling for a value added tax relief for charities; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The list is as follows:
Band Aid Appeal Fund
Bradford Fire Disaster Fund

Charities' VAT Reform Group
Methodist Homes for the Aged
Royal British Legion
Action Aid
Home Farm Trust
Help the Aged
Abbeyfield Society
PDSA
National Children's Home
Council for Christian Care
Licensed Victuallers' National Homes
John Groom's Association for the Disabled
British Heart Foundation
English National Folk Dance Society
Village Halls Forum
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission
National Trust

The representations of these charities about VAT are being carefully considered, but I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

WALES

Rural Environment

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to assist farmers and those living in the countryside in Wales to improve the rural environment.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Yes. I am pleased to announce that I am today launching a farm and countryside initiative in Wales. This will be similar to that announced for England by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food today in answer to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

The initiative will be linked to, and funded through, the Manpower Services Commission's community programme and has the backing of the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Wales Tourist Board, the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council and the agricultural training board.

The liaison point will be the five divisional offices of the Welsh Office agriculture department from whom those interested in putting forward projects can seek further information.

PRIME MINISTER

Medical Research Funding

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the co-ordination of policies on medical research funding.

The Prime Minister: Yes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science makes a grant-in-aid to the Medical Research Council on the advice of the Advisory Board of Research Councils on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services is represented. In deciding how to apportion its funds, the Medical Research Council takes account of the views of the health departments that are represented in the membership of the council.

Israeli Prime Minister (Meeting)

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel.

The Prime Minister: My talks with Mr. Peres on 22 January were interesting and constructive. They concentrated on current efforts to move towards middle east peace negotiations.

Westland plc

Mr. McNamara asked the Prime Minister on what dates in 1984 and 1985 she met Lord Aldington to discuss the affairs of Westland plc.

The Prime Minister: There were no such meetings.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Prime Minister (1) whether she authorised the formal declassification of the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January to the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and if she will make a statement;

(2) when the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January to the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was formally declassified; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Law Officers authorised the declassification and publication of the letter to which the hon. Member referred on 15 January, and it was accordingly placed that afternoon in the Library of the House by my right hon. Friend the Lord Privy Seal.

Mr. Cohen asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to her statement of 27 January, *Official Report*, column 657, what action she took or instructions she gave, and to whom, upon discovering the fact of the disclosure of extracts from the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January some hours after it had occurred; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister (1) on what grounds a non-attributable disclosure to the Press Association was chosen as the means of bringing the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January to the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), into the public domain; and if she will make a statement;

(2) when she first knew that a Westland board meeting and press conference were to be held at 4 pm on 6 January;

(3) if she had formed any view as to whether the Solicitor-General's opinion about the material inaccuracy of the then Secretary of State for Defence's letter to the European consortium should be brought into the public damain, before a copy of the Solicitor-General's letter to the then Secretary of State for Defence was received in her office; and if she will make a statement;

(4) if she knew from her discussions with her office on 7 January that the disclosure of the Solicitor-General's letter to the then Secretary of State for Defence had been made by officials of the Department of Trade and Industry; and if she will make a statement;

(5) if she knew from her discussions with her office on 7 January whether the Department of Trade and Industry officials had asked for the disclosure of the letter from the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence to be made from No. 10 Downing street; and if she will make a statement;

(6) if she knew from her discussions with her office on 7 January that the disclosure of the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January to the then Secretary of State for Defence had been unauthorised; and if she will make a statement;

(7) when she first became aware that the Solicitor-General had agreed to write to the then Secretary of State for Defence alleging material inaccuracies in his letter to the European consortium;

(8) if she had any discussions with her private office between 4 January and 1.30 pm on 6 January either concerning the possibility of bringing into the public domain the Solicitor-General's opinion that the then Secretary of State for Defence's letter to the European consortium contained material inaccuracies, or concerning the way in which the anticipated letter from the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence should be handled; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to what I said in my statement to the House on 23 January and my speech in the debate on 27 January.

EC Budget

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the question of whether the Commission should be empowered to spend the disputed sums in the budget passed by the European Assembly on 18 December, the vires of which were referred to the European Court by the Council meeting of 20 December; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. But the United Kingdom will shortly be applying to the European Court of Justice for an interim order suspending implementation of the disputed part of the budget until the court gives a decision on the substantive case.

European Act

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if it is her intention to take part in the signing of the European Act in Luxembourg on 17 February.

The Prime Minister: No. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), will sign for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will take steps to make the text of the European Act available to hon. Members before it is formally signed on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: The text was made available to hon. Members on 30 January.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to seek the approval of Parliament to the European Act before it is signed on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: No. The agreement can enter into force only if ratified in all member states. Legislation will be required to give effect to the agreement in the United Kingdom. In accordance with normal practice, Parliament will have a full opportunity to consider the agreement when legislation is brought before it.

Energy Conservation Scheme

Mr. Speller asked the Prime Minister if she will take steps to extend the provisions of the energy conservation scheme for industry and commerce operated in Northern Ireland by the energy division of the Department of Economic Development throughout the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Northern Ireland scheme is designed specifically to deal with the Province's problems of oil dependency and high energy costs. The Government have no intention of extending the scheme throughout the United Kingdom.

NORTHERN IRELAND

High Technology Firms

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to avoid closures of high technology firms in Northern Ireland like the shutdown of the American Monitor Corporation.

Dr. Boyson: The Industrial Development Board attaches high priority to promoting long-term employment in viable businesses. Where a company in difficulty has a prospect of viability with assistance, the IDB will consider making financial assistance available. The IDB is also prepared to assist companies seeking to secure their business through the introduction of new products or processes. In the case of American Monitor International it is unfortunate that despite the financial assistance provided the company has decided to cease trading; this was precipitated by the major shareholder, American Monitor Corporation of Indianapolis, filing for "Chapter 11" under United States bankruptcy laws.

Teachers

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of teachers employed in schools in Northern Ireland in each year since 1979 and the planned level of teaching staff for 1986-87.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is as follows (excluding peripatetic and supply teachers):

School year	*Number of full-time teachers*	*Number of part-time teachers*
1978-79	19,129	523
1979-80	19,027	565
1980-81	18,907	534
1981-82	18,721	576
1982-83	18,616	558
1983-84	18,483	590
1984-85	18,392	650

In 1985-86, 18,393 full-time posts have been allocated to schools and current plans for 1986-87 provide for an allocation of some 18,250 full-time posts in schools and some 200 full-time peripatetic and supply teachers. Because all allocated posts are not filled at the date on which statistics are collected, these figures are not comparable with the number of teachers employed. Information on part-time posts in 1985-86 and 1986-87 is not available.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action has been taken to meet the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education to increase the number of teachers in Northern Ireland by 2,500.

Dr. Mawhinney: The recommendations of the advisory committee on teacher education will be taken into consideration by my Department in its ongoing assessment of teacher numbers. Latest expenditure plans, however provide for no departure from the existing policy of determining teacher numbers on the basis of maintaining the existing pupil-teacher ratio.

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many compulsory redundancies of teachers there have been in controlled schools in Northern Ireland in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 January 1986, c. *409*]: The figures available are as follows:

	Number
1983-84	32
1984-85	19

The figure for 1982-83 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The figures indicate the result of falling enrolments in situations where the necessary staff reduction could not be achieved by other means.

Higher Education

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of funding for higher education in Northern Ireland for each year since 1979 and the higher education budget for 1986.

Dr. Mawhinney: The figures are as follows:

Financial Years	£
1979-80	56,701,487
1980-81	70,279,486
1981-82	75,653,658
1982-83	81,911,931
1983-84	88,061,320
1984-85	91,346,575
1985-86*	102,878,833

* Estimated

The budget figure for the 1986-87 year is not yet known. The figures for the financial years 1979-80 to 1984-85 exclude costs attributable to fees and awards for students undertaking first level courses at polytechnics.

The figures exclude costs attributable to courses at advanced further education level (normally considered as higher education) in colleges of further education for the financial years 1979-80 to 1985-86.

School Building

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Government will fund any new school building projects in Northern Ireland after 1 April.

Dr. Mawhinney: There will be a moratorium on all new major building projects in the education sector in the 1986-87 financial year. Expenditure on on-going major works however will be increased and an additional £2 million has been allocated to the schools minor works/ maintenance programmes.

Capital Project

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount of funding for new school building and other capital projects relating to education since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is as follows:

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*£ 000s 1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
SCHOOLS CAPITAL							
a. Major works	15,360	13,866	9,759	11,373	9,879	7,175	9,791
b. Minor works equipment etc.*	5,537	5,198	5,606	5,308	6,366	7,403	6,818
c. Total	20,897	19,064	15,365	16,681	16,245	14,578	16,609
OTHER EDUCATION CAPITAL							
a. Major works	19,016	16,133	12,919	14,244	13,656	9,129	9,126
b. Minor works equipment etc.*	7,910	7,868	7,445	9,508	11,285	10,564	12,188
c. Total	26,926	24,001	20,364	23,752	24,941	19,693	21,314
TOTAL EDUCATION CAPITAL	47,823	43,065	35,729	40,433	41,186	34,271	37,923

* Information on minor works, equipment etc. cannot be separately identified.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the security forces convicted of offences in Northern Ireland and sentenced to custodial sentences have been allowed to return to Great Britain on parole for humanitarian reasons in 1985.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many prisoners charged with scheduled offences in the latest calendar year were remanded in custody prior to trial for periods between *(a)* nought to three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to nine months, *(d)* nine to 12 months, *(e)* 12 to 18 months and *(f)* over 18 months for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively;

(2) how many prisoners for each year since 1980 were remanded in custody prior to trial for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively;

(3) what percentage of prisoners on custodial remand for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively, were *(a)* given a non-custodial sentence, *(b)* given a

custodial sentence and *(c)* found not guilty or not proceeded against for the latest calendar year and the year to date;

(4) what was the average length of time that prisoners spent on custodial remand for scheduled and non-scheduled offences respectively for the latest calendar year and the year to date;

(5) how many prisoners were remanded in custody prior to trial for scheduled and non-scheduled offences, respectively, for the latest calendar year and the year to date;

(6) if he will give the average period between remand and trial for prisoners refused bail and charged with scheduled offences in Northern Ireland in the latest calendar year and to date.

Mr. Scott: Data relating to the last quarter of 1985 became available only last week and I will be replying to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Non-scheduled Offences

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons were charged in Northern Ireland with non-scheduled offences; and how many persons were found not guilty of all or some of the offences with which they were charged in the year 1985 and to date;

(2) if he will give separately for magistrates' courts and Crown courts for 1985 the number of cases involving non-scheduled offences in which pleas of not guilty were entered; in how many of these cases verdicts of not guilty were returned; and in how many of these cases trial was by jury.

Mr. Scott: Data relating to the last quarter of 1985 became available only last week and I will be replying to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prison Population

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the size of the present prison population in Northern Ireland categorised by age and by sex in the following groups: under 18 years, 18 to 25 years, 25 to 30 years, 30 to 40 years, 40 to 50 years, 50 to 60 years and over 60 years old; and if he will give a breakdown of the length of sentence being served by percentage of the total prison population;

(2) if he will give details of the number of prisoners currently in Northern Ireland prisons, of the age structure of convicted prisoners in the prisons of Northern Ireland and of the number of convicted prisoners serving sentences for terrorist-type offences.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Security Statistics

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the security statistics for 1985 are now available, together with details of persons charged with terrorist-type offences and convictions for scheduled offences for the year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the number of prisoners refused bail for each year since 1980; and what is the average period of remand without bail for accused persons charged either wholly or in part on the basis of accomplice evidence in each of the following categories *(a)* the top decile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period, *(b)* the top quartile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period, *(c)* the second quartile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period and *(d)* the average period of remand for all prisoners charged on the basis of such evidence;

(2) what was the average period of remand without bail in each of the following cases involving accomplice witnesses' evidence of *(a)* persons convicted, *(b)* persons acquitted and *(c)* persons who were released as a result of such evidence being retracted; and how these figures compare with those for persons charged with terrorist-type offences on the basis of evidence other than accomplice evidence;

(3) how many persons accused of terrorist-type offences on the basis of accomplice witness testimony are currently awaiting trial in Northern Ireland; how many persons have been convicted and how many persons have been acquitted of such crimes after having been charged either wholly or partially on the basis of accomplice witness testimony; and how many persons have been released following the retraction of testimony by accomplice witnesses;

(4) what was the portion and number of persons accused of terrorist-type offences on the basis, either wholly or in part, of accomplice witnesses' testimony who were accorded bail; and what was the equivalent proportion of persons accused of terrorist crimes who were not charged on the basis of accomplice testimony who were accorded bail in 1985;

(5) if he will give the number of cases in which persons were convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland in 1985 on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown and in which evidence other than that of the accomplice, either forensic, from witnesses other than convicted terrorists or by an admission of guilt from the accused, was also used to obtain the conviction;

(6) how many persons were detained under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973 and 1978 in 1985;

(7) how many persons were detained in connection with terrorist-type offences under Acts other than the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts in 1985;

(8) what information he has concerning the number of people who were detained in 1985 under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and who were charged with scheduled offences under the Act, and other Acts, separately;

(9) if he will make a statement concerning the operation of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 in 1985 with regard to the annual total of arrests made under the Act; and how many persons arrested under the Act were detained for the following periods *(a)* up to 12 hours, *(b)* 12 to 24 hours, *(c)* 24 to 36 hours, *(d)* 36 to 48 hours, *(e)* 48 to 60 hours nd *(f)* 60 to 72 hours, indicating those numbers (i) not ultimately charged under the Act and released, (ii) those charged under the Act, (iii) those

charged with an offence but not under the Acts, indicating which offences and (iv) those charged under the Act but not initially detained under that Act;

(10) how many people have been convicted in the current year, either on their own admission of guilt or following a plea of not guilty, on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown in cases concerning scheduled offences in Northern Ireland; how many suspects arrested on the basis of such evidence have been released as a result of the retraction of evidence given by accomplices; and how many people are presently awaiting trial as a result of evidence obtained from terrorist accomplices.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts were charged with *(a)* offences under the Acts and *(b)* offences under other Acts in 1985.

Mr. Scott: In 1985, five people detained in Northern Ireland under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 were charged with offences under that Act. Two hundred and forty two were charged with offences under other Acts or with common law offences.

Female Prisoners

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average period of custodial remand for female custodial remand prisoners in Northern Ireland for the years 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Scott: Data relating to the last quarter of 1985 became available only last week and I will be replying to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average length of custodial sentence of female prisoners in Northern Ireland in 1985.

Mr. Scott: The average length of custodial sentence for females sentenced between 1 January 1985 and 24 November was eight months.

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Trotter asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which firms of *(a)* accountants and *(b)* consultants have been appointed to report to him since 1979 on the affairs of Harland and Wolff; when they were appointed; when their reports were received; and to what extent the firms concerned had previous knowledge or experience of the affairs of the company.

Dr. Boyson: The following firms have been appointed since 1979 to provide advice on the affairs of Harland and Wolff plc:

i. P.E. Consulting Group Ltd., appointed August 1981 and report provided in September 1981.
This firm had earlier in 1981 provided advice to a Government-appointed independent review team considering diversification opportunities at H and W; and

ii. P.A. Management Consultants, appointed June 1983 and providing advisory reports to the Department of Economic Development on an ongoing basis. This firm had been retained by H and W in 1982 to assist a management team in examining overhead costs at the yard.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Her Majesty's Government were aware before signing the Anglo-Irish agreement of the extent to which the Irish Government had engaged in consultation with the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland about the progress of negotiations on the agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects United States and European Economic Community aid anticipated at the time of the Hillsborough agreement to reach Northern Ireland; in what form; and on what conditions.

Mr. Tom King: [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *599*.] Following the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement on 15 November last year, the United States President issued a statement of support in which he spoke of finding tangible ways for the United States to lend political support to the agreement. The Speaker of the House of Representatives undertook to endeavour to see that this commitment was honoured by Congress and in December both Houses passed a resolution in support of aid. In mid-January, British, Irish and United States officials met in Washington for exploratory talks on United States financial and economic support. In the Community both the Commission and the European Parliament have expressed support for the Anglo-Irish agreement and for continued economic and social development in Northern Ireland. But no formal proposals have yet been made and it would therefore be premature to speculate about when or how aid might be available from either source.

Anglo-Irish Intergovenmental Conference

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends urgently to raise at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference extradition and extraterritorial jurisdiction in the terms of article 8 of the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *597-98*]: The matter has already been raised.

At the last meeting of the intergovernmental conference on 10 January we emphasised the need for an early review of policy aspects of extradition and related matters. The conference instructed officials to continue their discussions with a view to a meeting, before the next meeting of the conference, of a sub-group comprising, on the British side, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Attorney-General and, on the Irish side, the Minister for Justice and the Attorney-General.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the proposals considered in respect of Northern Ireland by the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which have been found to have application by the Irish Government in terms of article 2 of the Anglo-Irish agreement; and what action followed.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *597-98*]: Article 2 of the Anglo-Irish agreement makes it clear that proposals which the Irish Government

may make in respect of Northern Ireland may also be found to have application by the Irish Government. But it also makes clear that there is no derogation from the sovereignty of either the United Kingdom Government or the Irish Government and that each retains responsibilities for the decisions and administration of government within its own jurisdiction. The joint statements, issued after each of the three meetings of the conference, set out the matters which were raised. The extent to which any proposals made by the Irish Government in respect of Northern Ireland are already provided for in the Republic or may be provided for in future is a matter for the Irish Government.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is intended that the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference should sometimes meet in Dublin.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *597-98*]: There is no limitation under the agreement where meetings of the conference may be held. But there are no plans to hold a meeting in Dublin at present.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many United Kingdom civil servants, and how many Northern Ireland civil servants, are posted in the secretariat of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *597-98*]: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on 23 January, at columns *313-14*. The composition of the secretariat has not been finalised but the six or so staff who are likely to be needed will be drawn from the United Kingdom Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Posts will not be formally apportioned between the two services and the number of staff from each is therefore likely to vary as needs change.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what proportion the cost of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference will be borne by the two Governments.

Mr. Tom King: [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *597-98*]: The costs of the intergovernmental conference will be shared by the two Governments. The basis of the apportionment of costs has not yet been determined.

SOCIAL SERVICES

War Pensions

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received about the £4 disregard on war pensions;

(2) which Royal British Legion branches have made representations to him about the £4 disregard on war pensions.

Mr. Major: Over the years a number of representations about the £4 disregard on war pensions have been made by ex-service organisations, war pensions committees and others. Several organisations mentioned the disregard in their comments on the Government's Green Paper "Reform of Social Security".

Our records do not readily enable us to identify those branches of the Royal British Legion that have at some time made representations.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate the number of low income working families, as defined in Cmnd. 9517, who are not in receipt of means-tested benefits.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Furnished Accommodation

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the precise criteria required by his Department's local offices for claimants to prove there is no suitable furnished accommodation available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The chief adjudication officer, who provides guidance to local adjudication officers on the interpretation of the law, has recently issued revised guidance on the criteria to be taken into account when considering the suitability and availability of furnished accommodation; the revised guidance is at paragraphs 7176-7183 of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library.

Nursing Care

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will now ensure that all decisions concerned with the nursing of patients are made by nurses, trained and qualified to make such decisions.

Mr. Hayhoe: Decisions concerning professional standards of nursing care will continue to be made by appropriately qualified nurses. Each health authority should continue to have a senior nurse qualified to advise on and monitor these standards and to provide nursing advice on all decisions affecting services to and care of patients.

Patient Appointments

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the waiting time for *(a)* outpatient appointments and *(b)* in patient treatment in the ear, nose and throat specialities in (1) the United Kingdom, (2) England and (3) each of the Thames regions; and what has been the change in each over the previous year.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the right hon. Member all the information he seeks. Information on the waiting time in England for outpatient consultation is not held centrally, and statistics for the rest of the United Kingdom are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland. The estimated median interval between the date a patient was placed on the waiting list and the date of admission to ear, nose and throat departments in National Health Service hospitals is given in the table for the latest two years for which figures are available centrally.

NHS hospitals, ear, nose and throat inpatient departments.

Regional Health Authority	*Estimated median waiting time (in weeks) of waiting list cases*		*Change between 1982 and 1983* (in weeks)*
	1982	*1983*	
North West Thames	9	9	nil
North East Thames	9	11	+2
South East Thames	9	10	+1
South West Thames	11	12	+1
England	11	13	+2

* Waiting times in 1983 were affected by the industrial action in the Health Service in 1982.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the cost of extending the long-term rate of supplementary benefit to the adult unemployed under 60 years.

Mr. Newton: About £500 million. Our proposals in the Social Security Bill currently before Parliament would replace the present supplementary benefit scheme structure, including the distinction between the ordinary and long-term rates, by income support based on personal allowances and premiums.

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the frequency with which supplementary benefit claimants change addresses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I regret that no information is available centrally on the frequency with which supplementary benefit claimants change addresses. Statistics are not kept routinely so that information could only be obtained by a special exercise which would be disproportionately expensive.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the number of families with children with additional requirements included in their supplementary benefit assessment, by type and average amount of additional requirement.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 16 January 1986, c. *702*.]: The information at December 1983, the latest date for which information is available, is as follows:

(1) Type of additional requirement (AR)	*(2) Number of families with children in receipt of AR (thousands)*	*(3) Average amount of AR for families at (2)*
		£
Extra heating	692	3·09
Special diet	48	2·48
Extra laundry	20	2·47
Heavy wear and tear on clothing	6	1·25
Extra baths	6	1·42
Hire purchase	1	2·59
Hospital visiting fares	1	8·24
Blindness	1	1·41
Domestic assistance	*	10·00
Storage of furniture	*	5·44
Over 80 age addition	*	0·25

* Less than 500

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry.

About 706,000 families with children were in receipt of one or more additional requirements, averaging £3·31 a week for those families. This amount does not take account of the effect of the available scale margin in relevant cases, so that the average amount of additional benefit actually received would be somewhat lower.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people claimed supplementary benefit in Greenock and Port Glasgow in each of the years 1979 to 1985; and what percentage this represents.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *621*.]: The table shows the number of claims to supplementary benefit processed by the Department's offices at Greenock and Port Glasgow in each of the years from April 1979 to April 1985, and the percentage changes they represent.

	Greenock	*Percentage change*	*Port Glasgow*	*Percentage change*
1979/80	13,013	—	7,118	—
1980/81	14,268	+10	6,879	−3
1981/82	13,409	−6	6,716	−2
1982/83	13,173	−2	5,544	−17
1983/84	13,486	+2	5,720	+3
1984/85	12,731	−6	5,645	−1
Per cent. change between 1979/80 and 1984/85		−2		−21

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Whitney: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my predecessor to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 25 July 1985 at columns *765-71*.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Whitney: Grants are made only for purposes which contribute to the achievement of the Department's policy objectives, and include grants towards the central administrative costs of national voluntary organisations who help to achieve those objectives.

Every grant is subject to a condition that the money must be spent for the purposes for which it was given and is monitored accordingly. Grants are not available to support party political activity.

Tobacco

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money was spent in the last calendar year for which figures are available on curing people addicted to tobacco smoking; and if he will give a breakdown of the figure.

Mr. Whitney: Help and treatment to people wishing to give up smoking are generally offered as an integral part

of the service provided by health authorities and general practitioners and are not separately costed. Many smokers stop of their own volition and without medical help. In 1985-86 the Health Education Council spent some £2 million on anti-smoking measures, and in addition the Government have provided £1 million for a pilot media campaign to help persuade young people not to smoke.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money was spent on research into cures for tobacco addiction in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: Information on the total research effort in this field is not collected centrally. The Government allocated £73,000 to the Maudsley hospital in 1985-86 for research into the effectiveness of different treatment methods to help people stop smoking, and in addition some £100,000 in researching ways of discouraging young people from smoking. The Health Education Council has allocated about £150,000 to research in this field.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths were recorded from diseases normally associated with tobacco smoking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 16 December at columns *73-74*. The tables show the corresponding figures for England and Wales for 1984, the latest available calendar year.

	England and Wales	*Number 1984*
ICD* 162	Malignant neoplasm of trechea, bronchus and lung	35,739
ICD* 490-492, 496	Bronchitis and Emphysema, Chronic airways obstruction, not elsewhere classified	24,902
ICD* 410-414	Ischaemic heart disease	157,506

* International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

Drugs

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money was spent in the last calendar year for which figures are available on curing people addicted to drug taking; and if he will give a breakdown of that figure.

Mr. Whitney: Information is not available in the form requested. The cost of treatment provided for drug misusers by the family practitioner and general psychiatric and other hospital services is not separately identified. £1,878,650 was made available from central funds in 1984-85 for pump priming services for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug misusers.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money was spent on research programmes on drug taking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: The estimated expenditure on research into drug misuse by the Department during 1985-86 is £160,000.

Research into drug misuse is also funded by the Medical Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Health Education Council, the Home Office and, under the urban programme, by the Department of the Environment.

Evaluations of services being provided under the Department's drugs initiative are undertaken by the health and local authorities and voluntary organisations concerned, but the cost is not separately identifiable.

Mr. MacKenzie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many deaths were recorded as due to drug taking in the last calendar year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: The table shows the number of deaths registered in England and Wales in 1984 (the latest available calendar year) where the underlying cause of death was stated as drug dependence or non-depenent abuse of drugs (excluding alcohol and tobacco).

Number of deaths from drug abuse England and Wales 1984

	Number	
ICD* 304	Drug Dependence	102
ICD* 305.2-305.9	Non-dependent Abuse of Drugs (excluding alcohol and tobacco)	25

* International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the £5 million which he has promised to provide for drugs misuse services he has allocated to the Wolverhampton health authority.

Mr. Whitney: It will be for the West Midlands regional health authority to decide on the allocation to Wolverhampton health authority from its share of the additional £5 million which is being made available for the development of services for drug misusers in England. Authorities will shortly be notified of the detailed arrangements.

Heating Additions

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants in Scotland, in each of the years *(a)* 1983, *(b)* 1984 and *(c)* 1985 were awarded (i) extra heating additions at (x) the lower rate and (y) the

higher rate, (ii) central heating additions at (x) the lower rate and (y) the higher rate, (iii) age-related heating addition, (iv) disabled person's heating addition, (v) estate rate heating addition and (vi) any other heating addition.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible, giving information for 1983. Information for 1984 and 1985 is not yet available.

Exceptional Weather Payments

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the months in each of the last six years in which additional levels of social benefits have been made available for pensioners during exceptionally cold weather periods.

Mr. Newton: I assume the hon. Member has in mind the provision whereby householders in receipt of supplementary benefit are eligible for a single payment if they have used more fuel than they have budgeted for as a result of a period of exceptionally severe weather.

The weather was not considered to be exceptionally severe during 1981, 1983 and 1984. It was considered to be exceptionally severe over the whole of Great Britain in January 1982, and in certain areas of England and Wales during January and February 1985. No information is available for 1980.

Haemophiliac Counselling Centres

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in which regions of the United Kingdom the six haemophiliac counselling centres to which £270,000 has been devoted by his Department for tackling the spread of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus will be located; and what factors he took into account when deciding that £270,000 would be a suitable sum of money to allocate for this purpose.

Mr. Hayhoe: The £270,000 has been allocated equally between the regional health authorities responsible for the six existing reference centres which between them treat haemophiliac patients and provide guidance and support to haemophilia treatment centres throughout England.

The regions concerned are Northern, Oxford, Trent, North Western, North-East Thames and South-East Thames.

The allocation is intended to allow extra staff to be employed in the centres on counselling. They will advise on the implications of positive HTLV III antibody tests for haemophiliacs and their families.

Red Alerts

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will instruct district general managers to report directly to him if they have either three red alerts in any period of three months or have any red alert lasting more than 10 days or have two consecutive red alerts with an interval of less than one month between them; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will instruct the West Midlands regional health authority to inquire into the reasons for the North Staffordshire infirmary to be on red alert for the second time in the current winter and for this red alert to have occurred so soon after the previous one; if he will instruct them to assess how typical this hospital is in this respect and to consider what steps should be taken to avoid red alerts occurring in the future barring exceptional circumstances;

(3) if he will instruct regional health authorities to provide him with information regarding the number of occasions on which hospitals in their region were on red alert and the number of days for which the red alert lasted; and if he will instruct them to identify those hospitals which have frequent and long-lasting red alerts and to explore the reasons for this happening;

(4) if he will set up a departmental working party to investigate *(a)* the most common reasons for hospitals to be on red alert and *(b)* the consequences for patients on the various waiting lists.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have no plans to instruct regional or district health authorities or their general managers to make inquiries about or report details of red alerts to me. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said in his reply to the right hon. Member on 11 December 1985 at columns *686-87*, it is the responsibility of health authorities to manage and supervise hospital and specialist services to meet local need. I have no plans to set up a departmental working party to investigate the specific causes and consequences of red alerts.

Royal Liverpool Teaching Hospital

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the current bed capacity at the Royal Liverpool teaching hospital;

(2) what information he has about partial or total ward closures at the Royal Liverpool teaching hospital;

(3) how many patients have been turned away from the Royal Liverpool teaching hospital through lack of beds or medical staff to deal with potential inpatients in the last six months and 12 months; what is the establishment of doctor, nursing and ancillary posts; if any vacancies are current; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: As this information is not collected centrally the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Mersey regional health authority.

Mr. Abdessalem Ben Rabha

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Social Services pursuant to the answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *399*, from the hon. Member for Leicester, East, if he will seek the permission of Mr. Salah Abdessalem Ben Rabha to disclose whether he is in receipt of any social security benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I believe any such consent should be obtained direct from Mr. Salah Abdessalem Ben Rabha.

Special Claims Control Officers

Mr. Eastham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many special claims control officers have been posted to the Manchester, Cheetham office of his Department; what is the anticipated period of these inquiries; what will be the cost of these inquiries; if all claimants being interviewed will be advised of their rights; and if he will issue a statement as to their findings.

Mr. Major: A visit to the Manchester (Cheetham) office by a team of four specialist claims control officers

started on 27 January and is due to finish on 11 April: the cost of the exercise is not yet known. The officers are instructed to advise fully all claimants of their rights.

North-Western Regional Health Authority

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the last trade-union nominated member of the North-Western regional health authority ceased to sit; who replaced that member; if there are any unfilled places on the North-Western regional health authority; and if he has received any nominations from trade unions to fill a place on the North-Western regional health authority.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *490*, he will list those health authorities which had in full operation a computerised call and recall scheme for cervical cancer screening at the latest date for which such information is available.

Mr. Hayhoe: At June 1985 the following 13 health authorities were operating computerised call and recall systems for cervical cancer screening:

Barnsley
Bristol and Western
Chichester
Exeter
Isle of Wight
North Bedfordshire
North Devon
Rochdale
Rotherham
Salford
South Bedfordshire
Stockport
Torbay

A further 24 health authorities had as at June 1985 firm plans to implement computerised call and recall systems by the end of 1985.

In my reply to the hon. Member on 19 December 1985 at columns *324-25*, I listed the health authorities in both the above categories. Health authorities will next be asked to report progress towards implementing such systems in June 1986, as part of the normal planning and accountability process.

Leukaemia and Lymphatic Cancer

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys is including the royal ordnance factory, Burghfield and stomic weapons research establishment, Aldermaston and the reported high incidences of leukaemia and lymphatic cancer among young people living close to those establishments, in its comparative studies of malignancies in areas around nuclear bases and in control areas.

Mr. Hayhoe: The study includes the following localities:

Basingstoke Municipal Borough
Basingstoke Rural District
Bradfield Rural District (includes Aldermaston and Burghfield)
Kingsclere and Whitchurch Rural District
Newbury Municipal Borough
Newbury Rural District
Reading County Borough

Meningitis

Sir Anthony Kershaw asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether, in view of the repeated outbreaks lasting over a number of years of meningitis in the Stroud area of Gloucestershire, he will now take further steps to increase the medical resources being devoted to discovering the cause and the prevention of this disease; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Everything possible is being done to discover the cause of the incidence of acute meningitis in Stroud. The district health authority, with assistance and advice from the public health laboratory service and the communicable disease surveillance centre, are investigating meticulously all patients reported to have meningitis, their contacts and their environment. The Manchester public health laboratory and the Medical Research Council's clinical research centre at Northwick park hospital are both conducting research into meningococcal meningitis, and further work is being done by the research laboratories of the Wellcome Foundation.

Hospital Complaints Procedure Act 1985

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to implement the Hospital Complaints Procedure Act 1985.

Mr. Whitney: We intend to issue a consultation paper in the spring with a view to issuing the directions to health authorities required under the Act early in 1987, to take effect from 1 April 1987.

NHS (Matrons)

Mr. Lord asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider reintroducing the post of matron combining nursing and administration in the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Under Nursing and Midwidery Staffs Negotiating Council agreements, health authorities have a wide range of grades available to them to cover senior nurse managerial posts. No benefit would be obtained by re-introducing an imprecise umbrella grading title such as matron, although health authorities are free to use that title if and where they wish.

Supplementary Benefits Handbook

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects that the new supplementary benefits handbook taking account of changes in benefit rates in November 1985 will be published.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Human Tissue

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will place in the Library all documents and correspondence relating to the investigation in 1983 by officials of his Department into an alleged trade in dead human foetal material.

Mr. Hayhoe: [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 November 1985, c. *510*.]: I now have the agreement of the individuals concerned and am arranging for the correspondence to be placed in the Library.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the age breakdown and recorded cause of incapacity for work of *(a)* people who have been awarded severe disablement allowance and *(b)* people refused severe disablement allowance; and if he will give this information using the same classification of awards and refusals as in his answer of 29 November 1985, *Official Report*, columns *657-58*.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 January 1986, c. *499*.]: The available information as at 19 November is set out in the following tables. I regret that an analysis by reference to the reasons for award or disallowance, as in my reply to the hon. Member on 28 November 1985, at columns*657-58*, could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The tables derive from a special computer analysis of statistical returns, and their totals of awards and disallowances correct those given in my reply on 28 November 1985, at columns *657-58*, which were based on a clerical count. Tables 4 to 6 do not include those disallowed solely because they were over pension age.

Table 1

Number of new claims to severe disablement allowance which were awarded; Analysed by cause of incapacity, age at first day of qualifying period and marital status
Men

	All ages	*Age under 20*	*Age 20 to 24*	*Age 25 to 29*	*Age 30 to 34*	*Age 35 to 39*	*Age 40 to 44*	*Age 45 to 49*	*Age 50 to 54*	*Age 55 to 59*	*Age 60 to 64*	*Age 65 and over*
All causes	2,054	1,635	98	50	48	21	16	14	51	71	50	—
Infective and parasitic diseases	9	4	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	—
Neoplasms	34	21	1	1	2	—	—	1	3	2	3	—
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	19	13	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	—
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	9	6	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Mental disorders	773	666	39	17	20	13	3	—	8	1	6	—
Diseases of nervous system and sense organs	412	330	23	17	9	3	3	5	7	9	6	—
Diseases of circulatory system	68	13	—	—	1	1	2	3	19	20	9	—
Diseases of respiratory system	29	12	2	—	—	—	—	—	2	7	6	—
Diseases of digestive system	14	6	1	1	2	—	—	1	1	2	—	—
Diseases of genito-urinary system	13	10	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Diseases of pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of skin and subcutaneous tissues	6	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	79	43	4	—	3	2	3	3	1	11	9	—
Congenital anomalies	243	222	10	3	4	1	1	—	—	2	—	—
Symptoms and ill-defined conditions	155	117	7	6	2	—	3	—	6	11	3	—
Accidents, poisonings and violence	191	166	8	2	5	1	1	1	2	1	4	—
Unspecified	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observation without need for further medical care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 2

Number of new claims to severe disablement allowance which were awarded; Analysed by cause of incapacity, age at first day of qualifying period and marital status
Married Women

	All ages	*Age under 20*	*Age 20 to 24*	*Age 25 to 29*	*Age 30 to 34*	*Age 35 to 39*	*Age 40 to 44*	*Age 45 to 49*	*Age 50 to 54*	*Age 55 to 59*	*Age 60 to 64*	*Age 65 and over*
All causes	2,210	56	33	90	184	51	67	192	733	793	10	1
Infective and parasitic diseases	60	2	—	3	9	2	1	7	20	16	—	—
Neoplasms	100	—	—	6	9	1	4	5	39	36	—	—
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	38	—	—	1	—	1	—	5	17	14	—	—
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental disorders	102	17	1	5	15	1	2	9	30	22	—	—
Diseases of nervous system and sense organs	630	14	22	43	79	25	24	56	175	191	1	—

	All ages	Age under 20	Age 20 to 24	Age 25 to 29	Age 30 to 34	Age 35 to 39	Age 40 to 44	Age 45 to 49	Age 50 to 54	Age 55 to 59	Age 60 to 64	Age 65 and over
Diseases of circulatory system	302	1	—	3	6	3	9	28	109	142	—	1
Diseases of respiratory system	121	4	—	—	3	2	4	8	41	59	—	—
Disease of digestive system	21	1	—	2	1	—	—	1	6	10	—	—
Diseases of genito-urinary system	32	1	—	2	3	—	2	2	10	11	1	—
Diseases of pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of skin and subcutaneous tissue	11	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	3	5	—	—
Diseases of musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	595	9	7	12	32	11	16	54	226	225	3	—
Congenital anomalies	26	3	2	7	3	2	—	2	4	3	—	—
Symptoms and ill-defined conditions	127	3	—	2	14	2	4	12	36	49	5	—
Accidents, poisonings and violence	44	1	1	3	8	—	1	3	17	10	—	—
Unspecified	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observation without need for further medical care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 3

Number of new claims to severe disablement allowance which were awarded; Analysed by cause of incapacity, age at first day of qualifying period and marital status
Other Women

	All ages	Age under 20	Age 20 to 24	Age 25 to 29	Age 30 to 34	Age 35 to 39	Age 40 to 44	Age 45 to 49	Age 50 to 54	Age 55 to 59	Age 60 to 64	Age 65 and over
All causes	1,455	1,182	53	33	41	18	18	21	49	38	2	—
Infective and parasitic diseases	17	11	—	—	2	—	—	—	2	2	—	—
Neoplasms	27	19	1	1	—	—	1	—	2	3	—	—
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	20	16	—	1	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental disorders	550	470	14	8	17	8	5	5	12	9	2	—
Diseases of nervous system and sense organs	313	246	16	9	7	7	5	4	10	9	—	—
Diseases of circulatory system	18	9	1	—	1	—	—	—	4	3	—	—
Diseases of respiratory system	20	12	—	—	1	—	—	2	4	1	—	—
Diseases of digestive system	15	11	2	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Diseases of genito-urinary system	13	11	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Diseases of pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of skin and subcutaneous tissues	7	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	92	60	4	3	2	1	3	3	8	8	—	—
Congenital anomalies	210	179	10	6	8	2	1	2	1	1	—	—
Symptoms and ill-defined conditions	88	69	5	3	1	—	2	3	1	—	—	—
Accidents, poisonings and violence	61	58	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Unspecified	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observation without need for further medical care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 4

Number of new claims to severe disablement allowance which were disallowed; Analysed by cause of incapacity, age at first day of qualifying period and marital status
Men

	All ages	Age under 20	Age 20 to 24	Age 25 to 29	Age 30 to 34	Age 35 to 39	Age 40 to 44	Age 45 to 49	Age 50 to 54	Age 55 to 59	Age 60 to 64	Age 65 and over
All causes	848	75	88	75	72	42	48	70	121	159	97	1
Infective and parasitic diseases	13	—	—	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	—
Neoplasms	11	—	1	—	—	—	3	1	—	3	3	—

	All ages	Age under 20	Age 20 to 24	Age 25 to 29	Age 30 to 34	Age 35 to 39	Age 40 to 44	Age 45 to 49	Age 50 to 54	Age 55 to 59	Age 60 to 64	Age 65 and over
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	23	1	—	2	1	—	—	3	4	8	4	—
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	3	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Mental disorders	136	16	24	17	19	13	10	6	12	7	12	—
Diseases of nervous system and sense organs	95	20	14	10	7	4	7	11	9	8	5	—
Diseases of circulatory system	133	3	1	3	3	1	6	15	33	44	23	1
Diseases of respiratory system	48	1	—	1	2	1	3	6	5	21	3	—
Diseases of digestive system	19	—	1	1	5	1	—	—	5	4	2	—
Diseases of genito-urinary system	5	1	1	2	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Diseases of pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of skin and subcutaneous tissues	9	—	1	1	—	—	—	2	4	1	—	—
Diseases of musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	138	2	10	15	11	7	11	7	25	28	22	—
Congenital anomalies	14	9	—	2	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Symptoms and ill-defined conditions	112	19	9	5	10	7	5	12	8	22	15	—
Accidents, poisonings and violence	88	3	24	14	12	6	2	5	10	10	2	—
Unspecified	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observation without need for further medical care	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—

Table 5

Number of new claims to severe disablement allowance which were disallowed; Analysed by cause of incapacity, age at first day of qualifying period and marital status

Married Women

	All ages	Age under 20	Age 20 to 24	Age 25 to 29	Age 30 to 34	Age 35 to 39	Age 40 to 44	Age 45 to 49	Age 50 to 54	Age 55 to 59	Age 60 to 64	Age 65 and over
All causes	2,231	3	35	90	137	101	140	268	709	742	6	—
Infective and parasitic diseases	18	—	1	4	3	1	2	3	2	2	—	—
Neoplasms	42	—	—	—	1	3	2	3	18	15	—	—
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	41	—	1	1	1	1	2	9	16	10	—	—
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	7	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	3	—	—
Mental disorders	187	1	6	10	22	11	21	33	53	30	—	—
Diseases of nervous system and sense organs	183	2	7	20	22	15	21	21	38	37	—	—
Diseases of circulatory system	382	—	2	3	9	3	10	37	143	172	3	—
Diseases of respiratory system	192	—	1	6	8	6	8	20	68	75	—	—
Diseases of digestive system	67	—	1	5	8	4	2	9	19	19	—	—
Diseases of genito-urinary system	48	—	3	1	2	3	4	7	17	11	—	—
Diseases of pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of skin and subcutaneous tissue	9	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	3	3	—	—
Diseases of musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	700	—	5	18	33	22	43	74	244	259	2	—
Congenital anomalies	14	—	—	3	2	3	—	2	2	2	—	—
Symptoms and ill-defined conditions	234	—	3	8	16	26	18	31	59	72	1	—
Accidents, poisonings and violence	105	—	4	9	9	3	6	16	26	32	—	—
Unspecified	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Observation without need for further medical care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 6

Number of new claims to severe disablement allowance which were disallowed
Analysed by cause of incapacity, age at first day of qualifying period and marital status
Other women

	All ages	Age under 20	Age 20 to 24	Age 25 to 29	Age 30 to 34	Age 35 to 39	Age 40 to 44	Age 45 to 49	Age 50 to 54	Age 55 to 59	Age 60 to 64	Age 65 and over
All causes	468	56	53	37	33	32	30	55	86	86	—	—
Infective and parasitic diseases	3	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Neoplasms	11	—	—	1	1	—	2	3	—	4	—	—
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	9	—	—	1	—	—	2	1	3	2	—	—
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	3	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental disorders	119	7	16	13	15	16	10	15	20	7	—	—
Diseases of nervous system and sense organs	41	16	7	5	2	1	1	1	4	4	—	—
Diseases of circulatory system	36	—	—	3	—	1	2	5	9	16	—	—
Diseases of respiratory system	29	—	1	1	1	1	2	7	8	8	—	—
Diseases of digestive system	14	—	5	—	—	—	1	1	5	2	—	—
Diseases of genito-urinary system	5	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—
Diseases of pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of skin and subcutaneous tissues	3	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Diseases of musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	98	4	6	5	3	6	3	13	26	32	—	—
Congenital anomalies	14	12	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Symptoms and ill-defined conditions	64	13	10	4	7	6	4	7	7	6	—	—
Accidents, poisonings and violence	19	2	4	1	3	1	1	1	3	3	—	—
Unspecified	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observation without need for further medical care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 February 1986

SCOTLAND

Compulsory Purchase (Conveyancing Fees)

Mr. George Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the basis of compensation for conveyancing charges incurred in compulsory purchase transactions now that scale fees have been dropped.

Mr. Ancram: Although the Law Society of Scotland withdrew its scale of fees for general conveyancing as from 1 January 1985, the *Scottish Law Directory* still contains a recommended scale of fees for transactions with acquiring authorities. This scale provides the basis of compensation for conveyancing charges in compulsory purchase transactions, and I understand that the society has no intention of withdrawing the guidance on charges in this respect. Where the acquisition of an equivalent interest in another property is involved, compensation will be payable for reasonable legal expenses in respect of that acquisition. There is no recommended scale of fees for such transactions, but if the authority exercising compulsory purchase powers considers that an account of expenses in this connection is unreasonable, it may apply for the account to be taxed by the Auditor of Court.

Russian Language Teaching

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Scotland in how many schools in Scotland Russian is taught.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In 1983, the last year for which figures are available, Russian was taught in 30 schools in Scotland.

Cost of Living

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has about the cost of living in Aberdeen compared with the cost of living in London.

Mr. Allan Stewart: No information is available from official sources: the retail prices index compiled by the Department of Employment does not provide local figures.

Tourism

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he now expects to respond to the recommendations of the Scottish Affairs Committee made in March 1985 that the tourism function operated by the Highlands and Islands Development Board should be transferred to the Scottish Tourist Board.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to announce his response to the recommendation made by the Committee on Scottish Affairs very shortly.

Liquor Licensing Laws

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received the final results of the survey into the liquor licensing laws in Scotland carried out on his behalf by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The full report entitled "Drinking and Attitudes of Licensing in Scotland" has been published today and copies are in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Children's Homes and Hostels (Report)

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has received the report of the committee of inquiry into children's homes and hostels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: The committee of inquiry chaired by Judge William Hughes has now reported and the report is being published today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library. The committee of inquiry was appointed in March 1984 by the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland following an announcement on 18 January 1984 by the then Secretary of State.

The inquiry was held in public for the most part and witnesses had a right to be legally represented with all reasonable legal costs being met from public funds. 66 individuals gave oral evidence and written evidence was received from 26 individuals and organisations. On 10 days the committee took evidence in private in order to protect the identity and privacy of former residents of childrens homes.

I am grateful to Judge Hughes and the members of the committee for the thoroughness of their examination of the facts and of the underlying issues, for the deep concern shown in the report for the wellbeing of children and young people in residential homes and for the care and balance displayed in the analysis made by the committee of all that occurred.

The Government welcome the report as a full and objective analysis of events and I can give an assurance that its recommendations will now be pursued urgently with the interests concerned.

Judge Hughes' inquiry acknowledges the action which has already been taken to improve residential child care since the evidence of homosexuality came to light in 1980. The report endorses the action taken in introducing a new programme of inspection of children's homes under which each home will be inspected annually, in devising a complaints procedure for children in residential care and their parents, in improving the procedures for recruiting staff, in developing monitoring systems and in providing improved training for residential care staff.

There are many references in the report to the difficulties of preventing any detecting homosexual offences unless complaints are made by the children and young people concerned. The committee commented that the formal complaints procedure introduced in May 1985 to deal with this problem had not been fully put into effect because of difficulties in reaching agreement on the question of safeguards for residential care staff. I am glad to say that a set of guiding principles has now been developed which I am confident will fully protect the legitimate interests of children and staff. However, the recommendations now made in the report about

preliminary investigations will be carefully examined with a view to considering whether these guiding principles can be further improved. The exhaustive investigation undertaken by the inquiry did not bring to light any evidence of an official cover-up of homosexual affairs involving children and young people in residential care. However, the report draws attention to errors and weaknesses which the committee discovered in the operation of the child care system and while acknowledging the progress which has been made goes on to make a series of recommendations for further improvement.

I am confident that close study of the report will reassure the public that the various complaints and allegations which circulated regarding abuse in the child care system have been meticulously investigated and that a door has been closed on the past. I am also pleased to endorse the comments made in the report about the valuable work done by social workers in Northern Ireland and I concur with the inquiry in hoping that its outcome will help restore their personal and professional confidence in the way they do their demanding work.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the number of private firearms certificates currently issued in Northern Ireland together with such informatiom as he has regarding the distribution of such certificates between nationalist and loyalist communities; and if he will state the number of certificates held by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and its Reserve.

Mr. Scott: On 31 December 1985, 88,340 firearms certificates were on issue to persons in Northern Ireland. Information on the political affiliation of holders of firearms certificates is not kept. Information about the total number of private firearms certificates held by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

District Rates

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions have been made for setting a district rate in the 18 local councils currently adjourned in protest over the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland district councils have a statutory duty to make a district rate for 1986-87 not later than 15 February 1986. It is a matter for each individual council to make arrangements to meet this requirement. If any council fails to make a rate by this date, the Government will take whatever action is necessary to secure the exercise of this function, either by the use of default powers in existing legislation or, if necessary, by taking additional powers.

Victoria Barracks Flats

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why security staff have been withdrawn from the Victoria barracks flats complex.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I understand from the chairman that the executive's employment of specialist security staff at Victoria barracks was discontinued in January 1986 when it became clear that the service, which had been provided for some 18 months, was ineffective in preventing both vandalism to the communal areas and the illegal occupation of some flats.

Prison Population

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the size of the present prison population in Northern Ireland categorised by age and by sex in the following groups: under 18 years, 18 to 25 years, 25 to 30 years, 30 to 40 years, 40 to 50 years, 50 to 60 years and over 60 years old; and if he will give a breakdown of the length of sentence being served by percentage of the total prison population;

(2) if he will give details of the number of prisoners currently in Northern Ireland prisons, of the age structure of convicted prisoners in the prisons of Northern Ireland and of the number of convicted prisoners serving sentences for terrorist-type offences.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986]: At 24 November 1985 (the latest date for which figures in this detail are available) there was a total of 1,713 sentenced prisoners in Northern Ireland prison establishments. This figure includes inmates at the young offenders centre. The age distribution of the sentenced prison population is as follows:

	Male	*Female*
Under 18 years	35	—
18 years up to 25 years	521	5
25 years up to 30 years	508	8
30 years up to 40 years	506	6
40 years up to 50 years	101	2
50 years up to 60 years	16	—
60 years and over	5	—

The percentage distribution of sentenced population by length of sentence is as follows:

Length of sentences	*Per cent.*
Under 6 months	11·15
6 months to 1 year	3·04
1 year to 18 months	10·16
18 months to 2 years	0·29
2 years to 4 years	11·03
4 years to 10 years	17·16
10 years and over	21·37
Life	22·42

Young persons detained during the pleasure of the Secretary of State—3·39.

Of the 1,713 sentenced prisoners in custody on 24 November 1985, 1,211 were serving sentences for scheduled offences.

Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the number of cases in which persons were convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland in 1985 on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown and in which evidence other than that of the accomplice, either forensic, from witnesses other than convicted terrorists or by an admission of guilt from the accused, was also used to obtain the conviction.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986]: As I explained in my answer of 7 February 1985, courts make their decisions having regard to all of the admissible evidence which is placed before them. It is not possible to identify cases in which the eventual decision depended only on accomplice evidence.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons were detained in connection with terrorist-type offences under Acts other than the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts in 1985.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986]: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Students (Benefits)

Q22. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister how many students she expects to be worse off in 1986-87 as a result of the changes in students' rights to draw supplementary benefit and housing benefit.

The Prime Minister: It is estimated that some 415,000 students — about three quarters of the total — will be affected by the proposed social security changes and associated grant increase of £36 a year for those living away from home. some 140,000 of these, who currently claim no benefits except perhaps supplementary benefit or unemployment benefit in the long vacation, will gain the full value of the £36 grant increase. The net effect for the remaining 275,000 will vary according to their circumstances, but with the majority likely to have some reduction in their combined grant and social security entitlement compared to what it would be under the current arrangements.

Arms Control

Q30. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister whether she will make a statement on the consultations which she has had with the American Administration about arms control since the meeting in Geneva between Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev.

The Prime Minister: Arms control has naturally been one of the subjects discussed in my meetings with members of the American Administration since the Geneva summit, for example, when I saw Mr. Shultz and Mr. Weinberger on separate occasions in December.

Scottish Teachers (Pay)

Q103. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Prime Minister if she will meet representatives of the relevant unions to discuss the current Scottish teachers claim for an independent pay review.

The Prime Minister: No. The teachers' case would best be served by direct negotiation with the employers on pay and conditions on the basis of the resources available.

Engagements

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

Mr. Yeo asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

Mr. Flannery asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Telephone Calls (Tape Recording)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Prime Minister if any of the conversations on telephone calls to Downing street are tape recorded.

The Prime Minister: No, save that as under previous Governments important international telephone conversations have, on occasion, been recorded.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Licensing Laws

Mr. Nicholas Lyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of licensing laws in the light of the published report of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on drinking in Scotland.

Mr. Hurd: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report, which was published today, compares levels of alcohol consumption and patterns of drinking in Scotland before and after the passing of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976, which introduced a closing time of 11.00 pm on weekdays for all licensed premises in Scotland and allowed licensed premises to apply for weekday extensions enabling them to open outside the permitted hours. The report also examines public attitudes to the 1976 Act and the use which licensees have made of the opportunity to open for longer hours.

The study concludes that there is no evidence that the 1976 Act has caused an increase in alcohol consumption, and there are signs that it has led to more leisurely and responsible drinking. The main use made of extensions has been to allow afternoon opening on weekdays. The change in the law is generally popular, but public opinion is less favourable towards late evening extensions than towards afternoon opening.

The report provides a detailed picture of experience in Scotland. I shall want to consider it, and public reaction to it, carefully — bearing in mind continuing public concern about the misuse of alcohol—before reaching a decision on whether the law in England and Wales might be changed on similar lines so as to allow more flexibility in opening hours.

Criminal Records

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take on the recommendations of the working party he set up to devise a system whereby information about the unsuitability by

reason of criminal background of people seeking positions with access to children can be communicated to those who may employ them.

Mr. Mellor: A draft circular to give effect to the recommendations relating to paid and voluntary workers in local authority education and social services, and the probation service, has been circulated widely for comments. A draft circular covering National Health Service workers will be circulated shortly. Final circulars will be issued as soon as comments received on these drafts have been considered.

The review team is at present considering what arrangements can be made to cover those working with children in the voluntary and private sectors.

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he used in deciding to exclude the Police Federation and the Superintendents Association from the working party he set up to review arrangements for the disclosure of information about the criminal records of persons seeking employment where they would have substantial access to children.

Mr. Mellor: The steering group supervising this review was kept small to enable the review to proceed quickly. The police interest is represented by a chief constable and the officer in charge of the national identification bureau. Both the Superintendents Association and Police Federation were consulted on the first report of the review and will continue to be consulted at each stage.

Thames Valley Police

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *269*, when he will take the second step towards approving the balance of 150 additional officers requested by Thames Valley police authority.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. Friend will consider in the autumn the possibility of approving a further increase in the authorised establishment of the Thames Valley police.

Broadwater Farm, Tottenham

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers have been sent to Jamaica in connection with allegations about grants to Broadwater farm, Tottenham, during recent months; and if he will state the cost and the purpose of the visits.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Two Metropolitan police officers went to Jamaica to investigate allegations about the diversion of funds from the Broadwater Farm Youth Association. The cost was £6,368 in addition to the officers' salaries.

Preliminary and interim reports on the investigation have been passed to the Director of Public Prosecutions, but the final report will take some time to complete.

Electoral Statistics

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of people whose names are on the electoral register in more than one parliamentary constituency; and what are the principal categories of people who are so registered.

Mr. Mellor: The information needed to make the estimate requested is not available and could be obtained only at very considerable cost. However, my hon. Friend may be interested in the results of a sample survey of about 10,500 persons eligible to vote conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and published in "Electoral Registration in 1981", a copy of which is in the Library. 0·4 per cent. of those in the sample were legitimately registered at more than one address, although not necessarily in more than one constituency. In addition, there were instances of names being included on the register twice by mistake, usually because they had been retained on the register at a previous address in addition to being registered at a new qualifying address.

Population Statistics

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of foreign nationals resident in the United Kingdom; and what is his estimate of the number of citizens of the Irish Republic resident in the United Kingdom who are registered to vote in the United Kingdom parliamentary and local elections.

Mr. Mellor: It is estimated from the most recent labour force survey that about 1·1 million foreign nationals, of whom nearly half a million claimed to be citizens of the Irish Republic, and about 0·5 million Commonwealth citizens were usually resident in the United Kingdom in mid-1984. It is not known how many of these Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Irish Republic were on the electoral register as there is no requirement for applicants for electoral registration to state their citizenship-nationality. Other foreign nationals are not entitled to register.

Community Radio

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, of the 180 applications for the five experimental community radio licences in London, how many were from *(a)* Greek-speaking and *(b)* Afro-Caribbean groups.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Of the applications for the five experimental community radio licences in London, 18 are from groups wishing to provide a service primarily for the Greek-speaking community, and 16 for the Afro-Caribbean community. However, there are other applications from groups with a range of ethnic or language backgrounds, including those mentioned, wishing to provide a diversified service.

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now announce the successful applicants for the five experimental community radio licences in London.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 17 January, at columns 715-16.

Prison Disciplinary System

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the timetable for introducing the new prison disciplinary system.

Mr. Mellor: In announcing the publication of the report of the committee on the prison disciplinary system on 30 October 1985, my right hon. Friend accepted that new adjudication arrangements are needed. Consideration is still being given to what those arrangements should be.

Police Posts (Civilianisation)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of police posts civilianised in each of the past three years for *(a)* the Metropolitan police area and *(b)* all other force areas where such information is available without incurring such disproportionate cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 January 1986, c. 275]: The Commissioner estimates that 91 Metropolitan police officers were freed for operational duties by civilianisation of the posts they held in the financial year 1983-84; and a further 119 in 1984-85. Estimates for other police forces in England and Wales are that some 460 officers were freed for operational duties by the recruitment of additional civilians in each of the financial years 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Comparable information for 1982-83 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Building

11. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of new build schools, primary-infants, in the 1985-86 programme.

Mr. Dunn: The allocations of prescribed capital expenditure by local education authorities which are determined annually by my right hon. Friend are not announced in terms of individual school building projects. The need to build new schools to cope with local population growth is taken into account but local education authorities are free to use their allocations as they wish. The allocations made for capital expenditure by governors of aided and special agreement schools are project-based and in 1985-86 included five new primary schools.

The Department's records show that to date in the current financial year particulars in respect of major building projects for the provision of 51 new primary schools have been approved by my right hon. Friend.

Primary School Pupils

19. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil at primary schools in England in real terms in 1978 and in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what are the comparable figures for primary schools in Staffordshire.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authorities in England spent an average of £625 per primary pupil in 1978-79 and £730 in 1983-84. The comparable figures for Staffordshire are £630 and £760. All figures are at 1983-84 prices.

Schools (Midday Supervision)

21. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement regarding his policy towards the responsibility of teachers for the supervision of midday school meals.

Mr. Chris Patten: My right hon. Friend believes that the supervision of pupils at midday lies outside teachers' standard duties. Teachers who choose to take part in the alternative arrangements now being introduced will do so on separate contracts.

Burnham Committee

22. **Mr. John Fraser** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when next he expects to meet the Burnham Committee.

Sir Keith Joseph: Like my predecessors, I do not meet the full Burnham committee. I frequently hold meetings with the organisations which make up the committee.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

23. **Mr. Penhaligon** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is satisfied with the prospects to date of the plans to introduce the general certificate of secondary education examination system.

41. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether preparations for the introduction of the new general certificate of secondary education are still on schedule; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The preparations for the introduction of the GCSE are proceeding according to the timetable set by my right hon. Friend. The GCSE examining groups and the LEAs are well advanced in their preparations for the national programme of in-service training. In readiness for these training seminars, teachers' guides and videos have been made available to schools and colleges. Teachers are already in a position separately to begin their own preparations for the new examination courses.

62. **Mr. Hawksley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements have been made to assist teachers in the introduction of the new general certificate of secondary education examinations.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Secondary Examinations Council has completed its work on teachers' guides an videos which have been distributed to schools and colleges. These form the common materials for seminars for all teachers of the GCSE, under a special programme of in-service support, which starts this month and which is designed to introduce teachers to the special GCSE requirements for their subject. A further programme of training, devoted to specific syllabuses and provided by the GCSE examining groups will follow later this year. The Government are contributing substantially towards the cost of all this activity.

Head teachers (Expenditure Control)

24. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to give head teachers more control over decisions of expenditure relating to their schools.

Mr. Chris Patten: The forthcoming Education Bill will, as part of new arrangements for school government, include a proposal for schools to have a measure of responsibility for their own expenditure. Subject to appropriate rules, the governing body will have at its disposal a sum for capitation allocated by the LEA. It will need at least to involve the head teacher in spending this, and may delegate actual expenditure to him.

Teachers (Dispute)

25. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made towards a resolution of the teachers' dispute.

34. **Mr. Evennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

38. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest position on the teachers' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

39. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

43. **Mr. Malins** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

45. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

46. **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

52. **Mr. Andy Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

55. **Mr. Lilley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest position on the teachers' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

60. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about recent developments in the teachers' dispute.

63. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current teachers' dispute.

66. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest situation in the teachers' pay dispute.

67. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current teachers' pay dispute.

68. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current position in the teachers' pay dispute.

78. **Mr. Hancock** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current state of the teachers' dispute.

79. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the teachers' dispute.

80. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the latest situation in the teachers' pay dispute.

81. **Ms. Harman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the latest situation in the teachers' pay dispute.

83. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

84. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

85. **Sir Reginald Eyre** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

86. **Sir Edward Gardner** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

93. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

94. **Mr. Normanton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

95. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

97. **Mr. Kilroy-Silk** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the present situation in the teachers' pay dispute.

98. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress is being made in the teachers' dispute.

99. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), the hon. Members for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) and for Easington (Mr. Dormand) and my hon. Friends the Members for Leicester, South (Mr. Spencer) and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls).

29. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has received about the effect of the teachers' dispute on examination candidates.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Department has received information from many sources including letters from parents, schools and local education authorities. The effect of the dispute so far is inevitably difficult to quantify and will have varied from school to school. I share the deep concern felt by pupils and their parents, and I deplore any action by teachers which might harm children's education and their performance in public examinations.

36. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in the last month from the teaching trade unions on the teachers' pay dispute.

44. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in the last month from the teaching trade unions on the teachers' pay dispute.

82. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received recently from the teaching trade unions on the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have received a letter dated 20 January from the general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers.

48. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what extra money is available to education authorities to finance that part of the teaching employers' offer which is attributable to restructuring.

Sir Keith Joseph: The provisional agreement reached at ACAS on 24 January incorporates an increase of 6·9 per cent. from 1 April last and of a further 1·6 per cent. from 31 March 1986. These increases are not conditional upon any reform of the pay structure but are tied to an end to disruption and a joint commitment to negotiate across pay, pay structure, duties and other conditions of service for 1986. The Government hold to the conditional offer which they made last August to release additional resources if sufficient progress is made towards the Government's objectives for an improved pay structure and a clarification of teachers' duties.

57. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take to help resolve the teachers' pay dispute.

64. **Mr. Soley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will provide any additional sums of money to resolve the teachers' pay dispute.

65. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take to resolve the teachers' pay dispute.

75. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will provide additional sums of money to resolve the teachers' pay dispute.

77. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now allocate more new money to the education authorities to help bring the teachers' dispute to an end; and if he will make a statement.

92. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take to seek to resolve the teachers pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: I refer the hon. Members to the answer which I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek).

70. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will set up an independent inquiry into the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: No.

73. **Mr. Conway** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what indications he has received from the National Union of Teachers as to the terms under which they would be prepared to halt the current disruption of children's education.

Sir Keith Joseph: Such indications as I have come from the motion carried at a National Union of Teachers conference last month and the reports which I have read of statements by the union's general secretary. These indicate that the NUT will persist with certain forms of disruptive action if the management and teachers' panels conclude a formal 1985 pay settlement which is unacceptable to the NUT. It has long been clear that the NUT's terms for a settlement far outstrip the local authorities' ability to pay and it is most sad that the NUT should announce its willingness to continue to damage children's education in the event of it being outvoted by its fellow union members on the teachers' panel.

76. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what meetings he has had since Christmas with the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

89. **Miss Maynard** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has had any meetings in the current year with the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

90. **Mr. Dobson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has had any meetings in the current year with the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

91. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what meetings he has had since Christmas with the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

96. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has had any meetings in the current year with the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

87. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the teaching trade unions to discuss the teachers' pay dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: I met all the unions represented on the Burnham primary and secondary committee during the second half of 1985—some of them more than once.

Student Grants

26. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current level of student grants.

100. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the level of student grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

30. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss student financial support.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend last met NUS representatives to discuss student financial support on 3 December 1984. My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for the City of London Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), last met NUS representatives on 12 November 1985.

31. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis the additional grant for students studying in London is calculated.

Mr. Walden: The London rate of grant reflects the higher costs associated with living in London.

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what calculation he intends to make, when determining the level of student grants, to take account of community charges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: Decisions have not yet been taken on whether and how students should be compensated for any community charge payable by them.

Science Funding

27. **Mr. Bowen Wells** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current and proposed level of funding for science; and how the money will be distributed.

Mr. Walden: The science budget, from which the research councils receive their grant-in-aid, will be £615 million in 1986-87 and is planned to be £629 million and £645 million in 1987-88 and 1988-89, respectively. My right hon. Friend is advised on the distribution on this budget by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils and the board's advice, which he has accepted, is available in the Library of the House. Scientific research is also supported through block grants to universities through the University Grants Committee, the distribution of which within universities is a matter for individual universities. The total amount spent on scientific research through the UGC is difficult to determine accurately, because it depends on an estimate of the distribution of universities' resources among different functions, but it is estimated that it amounts to approximately £600 million per annum.

Higher Education

28. **Mr. Forman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish a White Paper on higher education.

Mr. Walden: The Government will be reviewing their policies in the light of responses to our Green Paper "The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s", and hope to be able to make a further statement of intentions in 1986.

40. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research has been carried out by his Department into the effect of changes in student income on the take up and retention of places in higher education.

Mr. Walden: The Department has carried out research at various times into the range of factors, including economic factors, which affect the demand for higher education. An account of the Department's research was included in "Technical Report to DES Report on Education Number 100", published in July 1984, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Medical Degrees (Cost)

32. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the full estimated cost, including maintenance, for undertaking a medical degree at a London teaching hospital.

Mr. Walden: At current prices the full estimated cost, including maintenance, of producing a medical graduate in Great Britain is estimated to be of the order of £130,000. This includes the cost of a service increment for teaching (estimated to be £74,000 per student) made available to teaching hospitals by the DHSS. It is not possible to provide a specific figure for London teaching hospitals.

School Buildings (Maintenance)

33. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated cost of conducting essential repairs on existing school buildings.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not held by the Department.

Science Budget

35. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received on the size of the science budget.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received 74 representations during the last two months.

Student Incomes

37. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information is available to his Department in respect of the expected change in the average income of full-time students between 1978 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Walden: The Department does not collect information on student incomes. For those full-time students in receipt of full value awards, the average maintenance award rose from £1,007 in the academic year 1977-78 to £1,748 in 1983-84 including assessed contributions from parents and spouses, and from £727 to £1,311 over the same period excluding such contributions.

Research and Development

42. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to increase Government resources devoted to civilian research and development.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend announced details of the Government's expenditure plans for education and science in the House on 12 November 1985. These plans included additional funds for science compared to previous plans. They will be further reviewed in the annual cycle of public expenditure surveys in the usual way.

School Places (Appeals)

47. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many parents appealed against their local authority's allocation of school places in 1985; and how many were successful.

Mr. Dunn: From inquiries made of local education authorities by the Department, it would appear that there were about 9,000 parental appeals against school admission decisions in 1985, of which some 4,000 were decided in parents' favour.

Corporal Punishment

49. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will announce Government policy on corporal punishment in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: In the Government's view, schools should be free to decide for themselves on the availability and use of corporal punishment. However, a ruling of the European Court of Human Rights requires us to secure respect for the philosophical convictions of parents who do not wish their children to be subject to this sanction and, following our decision last Session not to proceed with the Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill, we are considering the appropriate course of action to take.

School Governing Bodies

50. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to seek to modify the role and powers of boards of governors of state schools; and if he will make a statement.

51. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to extend parental advice and accountability in education.

Mr. Dunn: As announced in the Gracious Speech, a Bill will be introduced this Session to reform the composition of school governing bodies and to clarify their functions. The Government's policies in these matters are set out in chapter 9 of the White Paper "Better Schools" (Cmnd. 9469). In particular, the proposals provide for parents to be more involved in the running of their children's schools: the parental voice will be strengthened on the governing body; and that body will be required to account annually to all parents with a report and meeting.

Remuneration of Teachers Act

53. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will commission a review of the working of the Remuneration of Teachers Act with a view to introducing legislation to amend or replace the Act with a better method of establishing teachers' pay and conditions of service.

Sir Keith Joseph: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst).

CERN

54. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce a decision on the future level of British participation in CERN.

Mr. Walden: When Sir John Kendrew, at the request of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils and the Science and Engineering Research Council, undertook his review my right hon. Friend assured the Ministers responsible for CERN in the other member states that if we were to embark on any change in our relationship with CERN that would be done by due process and in consultation with them. In December I visited CERN, and subsequently consulted widely with other member states, on a United Kingdom proposal for a radical joint independent review of CERN and its future development. No member state has opposed a review in principle. Consultations continue; and the president, Professor W. Kummer, will convene an extraordinary session of the CERN council on 20 February to discuss the United Kingdom proposal. If the review goes ahead, my right hon. Friend's decision on the future level of British participation will be taken in the light of its report.

Teacher Training

56. **Mr. Rowe** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made towards his stated intention of improving initial teacher training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education which my right hon. Friends set up in 1984 is carrying out a detailed review of all courses of initial teacher training in England and Wales against the criteria set out in the DES circular 3/84 (Welsh Office 21/84). Teacher training institutions are making considerable efforts to develop and adapt their courses in order to meet those criteria. At my right hon. Friend's request, the national advisory body conducted a detailed review of the distribution of teacher training intakes in the public sector of higher education following which my right hon. Friend has allocated intakes for 1986; similar action has been taken in Wales. The DES is now considering the allocation of public sector intakes in England for 1987-89 with a view to securing as high quality and cost-effective a system of initial teacher training as possible. In Wales, the Wales advisory body is undertaking a review of provision in the public sector before offering advice on the allocation of intakes for the period 1987-89. Initial teacher training in the universities for 1986 has been announced and university intakes for 1987-89 are now being considered by the University Grants Committee.

58. **Mr. Allan Roberts** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current level of provision for the training of teachers working in special schools.

Mr. Chris Patten: Information is not yet available about the number of those undergoing in-service training in the current academic year. In the academic year 1984-85, 1,326 students took one year full-time (or part-time equivalent) courses concerned with special educational needs. Of these, 1,135 were teachers employed in maintained schools and in establishments of further education. One hundred and sixteen students were admitted to courses of initial teacher training for special educational needs in Autumn 1985 and target intakes to such courses in 1986 have been set at 123. In addition, a number of initial training courses for primary teachers contain substantial special education components.

Dyslexic Children

59. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy towards the provision of resources for the education of dyslexic children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Under section 8 of the Education Act 1944, as amended by the Education Act 1981, local education authorities have a duty to secure the availability for their area of sufficient schools for all pupils, and to have regard to the need for securing that special educational provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs.

Inner London Education Authority

61. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what new building projects for the Inner London education authority area have been approved by his Department.

Mr. Dunn: It is for local education authorities to decide on the use of their prescribed capital expenditure allocations in the light of their individual circumstances. My right hon. Friend has made a prescribed capital expenditure allocation of £14·261 million for expenditure by the Inner London education authority on education projects in 1986-87. In making that allocation, he took account of £7·243 million of new capital works in the authority.

Association of University Teachers

69. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives of the Association of University Teachers to discuss the state of higher education.

88. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives of the Association of University Teachers to discuss Government spending on the universities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the Association of University Teachers on 18 April 1985 when he discussed with them the funding of research, the Jarratt report on efficiency studies in universities, the forthcoming Green Paper on higher education, national insurance contributions and the pay of universities' academic staff. I subsequently met AUT representatives on 27 November 1985 and discussed university funding and academic pay.

Research Projects

71. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the current level of research council's funding of alpha-rated research projects in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Walden: Details of funded and unfunded alpha grants in 1980-81 to 1984-85 were given in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst) on 20 January at columns 79-80. My right hon. Friend announced increases to the science budget in 1985-86 and 1986-87 in the relevant public expenditure statements, and indicated that he hoped that a proportion of the additional funds would enable the councils to fund further high quality proposals from the universities.

School Governing Bodies

72. **Mr. Watts** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will introduce legislation to provide for the representation of commerce and industry on school governing bodies.

Mr. Dunn: The Government accept that representatives of industry and commerce can make a valuable contribution to the work of school governing bodies. The forthcoming legislation on school government will not, however, make explicit provision for such representation. This may often be provided indirectly through the ordinary election and appointment of governors. Additionally, governing bodies will be urged to use their proposed new duty to co-opt additional governors to secure such wider representation as they consider appropriate.

Expenditure

74. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the current level of education spending per pupil in England, and as to how this compares with the per pupil spending of the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Chris Patten: The net institutional expenditure per pupil in maintained primary and secondary schools in England in 1983-84, the latest year for which actual figures are available, was £875; the corresponding figure for the Inner London education authority was, at £1,475, 69 per cent. higher.

Criminal Records

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to ensure that his list 99 provides an adequate listing of the criminal records of persons employed by his Department and other agencies for which he is responsible who by virtue of their work have substantial access to children.

Mr. Chris Patten: List 99 does not list criminal records but only basic details of persons barred by the Secretary of State for Education and Science from teaching and other work involving regular contact with children or young people. The continuation of the list in its present form was recommended in the first report of the joint review of the disclosure of criminal convictions of those with access to children, a copy of which is in the Library. The report describes how list 99 is maintained, including police reporting of relevant convictions of persons in the education sector.

Examinations Performance (Research)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals are presently being considered by his Department for research comparing examination performances in different secondary schools.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has received a number of proposals for research work in this area: these are under consideration.

Pupil Unit Costs

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing for each

local authority area in England, and for England as a whole, the pupil unit costs at *(a)* maintained primary and *(b)* maintained secondary schools, respectively, for 1983-84.

Mr. Dunn: The information is given in the following table:

LEA	*Average net cost per pupil 1983-84 (Cash)*	
	Primary (£)	*Secondary (£)*
Barking	815	1,090
Barnet	830	1,190
Bexley	710	1,030
Brent	980	1,365
Bromley	760	1,095
Croydon	750	1,145
Ealing	975	1,220
Enfield	705	1,055
Haringey	1,095	1,475
Harrow	760	1,200
Havering	740	1,135
Hillingdon	825	1,190
Hounslow	900	1,150
Kingston-upon-Thames	730	1,055
Merton	780	970
Newham	950	1,340
Redbridge	745	1,125
Richmond-upon-Thames	800	1,040
Sutton	680	1,000
Waltham Forest	875	1,305
ILEA	1,215	1,760
Birmingham	665	980
Coventry	785	1,065
Dudley	650	935
Sandwell	770	1,045
Solihull	690	915
Walsall	785	1,055
Wolverhampton	815	1,070
Knowsley	770	1,140
Liverpool	830	1,105
St. Helens	675	990
Sefton	685	985
Wirral	675	990
Bolton	640	965
Bury	645	1,010
Manchester	785	1,190
Oldham	700	925
Rochdale	705	1,115
Salford	725	1,025
Stockport	670	945
Tameside	715	975
Trafford	685	965
Wigan	690	1,045
Barnsley	795	990
Doncaster	785	995
Rotherham	700	925
Sheffield	880	1,115
Bradford	745	890
Calderdale	725	940
Kirklees	675	880
Leeds	720	920
Wakefield	765	915
Gateshead	805	975
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	875	1,195
North Tyneside	780	1,060
South Tyneside	815	1,050
Sunderland	700	970
Isles of Scilly	1,065	1,360
Avon	705	1,025
Bedfordshire	745	985
Berkshire	690	980
Buckinghamshire	665	1,010
Cambridgeshire	645	940
Cheshire	680	945
Cleveland	710	1,005
Cornwall	640	915
Cumbria	715	990
Derbyshire	695	955
Devon	645	925
Dorset	685	930
Durham	715	905
East Sussex	690	950
Essex	645	955
Gloucestershire	660	950
Hampshire	645	930
Hereford and Worcester	655	885
Hertfordshire	695	1,020
Humberside	775	980
Isle of Wight	705	910
Kent	625	900
Lancashire	640	950
Leicestershire	725	1,030
Lincolnshire	635	940
Norfolk	680	960
North Yorkshire	710	975
Northamptonshire	670	960
Northumberland	690	925
Nottinghamshire	760	1,030
Oxfordshire	730	1,010
Salop	675	965
Somerset	630	890
Staffordshire	760	980
Suffolk	705	915
Surrey	665	990
Warwickshire	670	930
West Sussex	625	925
Wiltshire	650	945
England	730	1,015

Schools (Privatisation)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to encourage local education authorities to privatise schools.

Mr. Dunn: No.

Politically Sensitive Subjects (Teaching)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to consult his education partners regarding the form and content of the teaching of politically sensitive subjects.

Sir Keith Joseph: I, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, have decided, in view of the concern which has been expressed, to invite the education service to endorse a statement of the principles which should inform teaching in relation to politically controversial matters in schools and colleges. I am issuing today, for consultation, the draft of such a statement together with a draft circular.

The texts of these and of my covering letter are as follows:

Draft statement of principles

THE TREATMENT OF POLITICALLY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

1. One of the principal functions of education is to prepare pupils and students for the active discharge of the responsibilities of citizenship. It has long been recognised that this means, among other things, that issues of a politically controversial character will inevitably figure in some parts of the curriculum and can arise spontaneously in many. In treating such issues the education service in this country applies the principles appropriate to a free and open society.

2. Their application has a positive aspect. It is part of the task of schools and colleges to promote the attitudes, knowledge and skills which are necessary for the preservation of our society's fundamental values, notably its commitment to parliamentary democracy, the freedom of the individual within the law, and the equality of all citizens under the law. Among the attitudes to be promoted are a rational approach to evidence and argument, both in forming opinions and in resolving differences; awareness of the duties and rights of citizenship; respect for the law; and respect for the rights of others, including the right to hold their own opinions and to express them within the law. Pupils and students need to be equipped with the intellectual skills which are necessary if our society's fundamental values are to be understood, critically appraised, developed and defended.

3. It follows that, within the limits set out above, schools and colleges should be ready, in the interests of good education, to tackle issues which are politically controversial. In doing this teaching staff should at all times seek to distinguish between fact and opinion, be ready to acknowledge personal bias, make clear that on matters of opinion views other than their own may be legitimately held, and encourage pupils and students to form their own conclusions on the basis of evidence and reflection and of discussion with others. How this is best done for pupils and students of varying maturity and understanding is a matter of professional judgment and calls for the exercise of professional responsibility.

DRAFT CIRCULAR

The education service in this country has a long and honourable tradition of upholding the principles of a free and open society. The Secretary of State is concerned that this tradition should be upheld in al circumstances and at all times. Consultation has shown that his concern is widely shared.

The statement attached to this Circular has been the subject of consultation with the bodies concerned within the education service; it sets out the principles in accordance with which the Secretary of State intends to continue to exercise his statutory functions. He asks local education authorities and the governing bodies of schools and further education establishments to have regard likewise to the statement when they discharge their own responsibilities and in any guidance which they give to the teaching staff.

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FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

THE TREATMENT OF POLITICALLY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

The Government shares the widely held view that preparation for the responsibilities of citizenship is one of education's principal functions; and that pupils and students under the age of majority therefore need to be introduced, as indeed they are, to those issues of a political character which they will come across in the course of their adult lives.

I am, however, aware of disquiet that certain politically controversial issues may sometimes be tackled in schools and colleges in a manner which amounts to the teaching, openly or covertly, of a particular partisan political view. The education service has a long and honourable tradition of upholding the principles of a free and open society. I am sure that all the partners in the service agree that this tradition must be upheld.

In my view the public have a right to be reassured on this score. I therefore propose to issue a circular containing a statement of principles on the lines of the attached drafts. The statement sets out afresh the principles which the partners in the education service have long adopted in discharging their functions. I believe therefore that your association would wish to endorse such a statement and to commend it to your members.

I should be glad to know whether you and the organisation you represent have comments on a circular on these lines and whether you are willing to commend the statement in it to your members. As in the case of all circulars issued in draft on my behalf, I would be willing to consider any suggestions you have for amending the text of the draft circular and the draft statement. Nicholas Edwards is consulting education partners in Wales in the same terms.

Keith Joseph.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Falklands Fishery

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the United Kingdom fishing industry about the implications for it of the future development of the Falklands fishery.

Mr. Gummer: Fisheries at the Falklands are principally a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I have, however, received representations from a small number of companies in the United Kingdom fishing industry on the desirability of securing greater regulation of the level of fishing in the waters around the Falkland Islands with a view to protecting the barter deals involving squid caught by east European vessels and delivered to Japan, to which I referred in my answer to the hon. Member for Kingston Upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) on 10 December 1985, at column 587, as well as to improving the potential viability of a limited United Kingdom participation in the fisheries.

The Government are actively seeking international regulation of the south-west Atlantic fishery and a study to this end is under way in the Food and Agriculture Organisation, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs explained in a written answer to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 20 January, at column 34.

Surplus Food and Drink

Mr. Canavan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the most up-to-date amount and value of surplus food and drink stored *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the entire European Economic Community; and what is the cost of storage.

Mr. Gummer: A note setting out the volume of United Kingdom and Community intervention stocks, including those of foodstuffs, on the latest available dates is deposited in the Library of the House and is updated monthly.

The estimated value of United Kingdom intervention stocks of foodstuffs (excluding feedwheat and barley) at 31 December 1985 calculated on the basis of the buying-in prices valid at that date was £678 million.

The estimated value of Community intervention stocks at the end of November 1985, converted from agricultural ecu into sterling at the United Kingdom's agricultural conversion rate, was £5,755 million.

The latest estimate of storage and related costs in respect of United Kingdom intervention stocks (including feed grains) is £102 million as given in the 1985-86 Winter Supplementary Estimate for class III, vote 1. We have no figures for storage costs incurred by other member states.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant-aid in the last financial year for which figures are available and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Jopling: Details of grants paid to voluntary bodies and organisations by my Department in 1984-85 are as follows:

	£
National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs	16,000
National Proficiency Tests Council	85,600
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	1,500

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant-aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jopling: Information is not maintained centrally as to whether any of my Department's numerous sponsored bodies provide secondary support of this kind, and it could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant-aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Jopling: All payments to sponsored and voluntary bodies are voted by Parliament through annual Estimates for purposes which further my Department's objectives. In addition to the close operational contacts maintained by my officials, formal controls are exercised over each body to ensure that such payments are used only for approved purposes. Where appropriate, such controls include cyclical reviews on lines prescribed centrally by Cabinet Office and Treasury.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the current acreage of *(a)* grade I, *(b)* grade II and *(c)* grade III agricultural land.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that precise figures are not available. Information derived in early 1983 from the provisional 1:63360 scale agricultural land classification maps shows that in England about 3 per cent. of agricultural land was in grade 1, 17 per cent. in grade 2 and 54 per cent. in grade 3.

DEFENCE

Fylingdales

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence who owns the present radars at Fylingdales, who provided the funds for them; and who will *(a)* own and *(b)* provide the funds for the proposed new radars at Fylingdales.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The United States Government funded and own the radar equipment which is at present in use at RAF Fylingdales. As regards the proposed update of the facilities at Fylingdales, I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 30 October last, at column 504.

FH70 Ammunition

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the 1985 FH70 ammunition order to Rhine Metall GmbH has been manufactured by that company and delivered to him to date.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A pre-production lot of L15 shells has been produced and is awaiting completion of assessment before production starts. Deliveries to the United Kingdom should commence shortly.

RIMPAC Naval Exercise

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what United Kingdom naval vessels will be participating in the RIMPAC naval exercise; what is the scope, nature and purpose of the exercise; what other countries will be participating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The United Kingdom surface ships taking part in Exercise RIMPAC are planned to be Her Majesty's Ships Illustrious, Beaver, Manchester and Amazon, and the RFAs Olmeda, Bayleaf an Fort Grange. This exercise is sponsored by the United States Navy and the release of public information about it is a matter for the USN.

RN Stores Depot, Llangennech

Mr. Denzil Davies asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when it is now envisaged that the test workshops and facilities will be moved from the Royal Navy stores depot, Llangennech;

(2) what is the estimated cost of moving the naval weapons engineer test facilities from the Royal Navy stores depot at Llangennech and re-establishing them at other locations.

Mr. Lee: My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Support will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

South Africa

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the six months period agreed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to review the situation in South Africa has been put back to 30 June.

Mrs. Chalker: The Commonwealth accord clearly placed the proposed review of the situation in South Africa in the context of the work of the group of eminent persons. The members of the group met for the first time on 12 December and agreed with the Commonwealth Secretary-General that the review of their work should take place six months from the beginning of January 1986.

United Nations

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what complaints have been made about wasteful expenditure at the United Nations by the United Kingdom permanent representative; and if he will consider the withdrawal of the United Kingdom delegation from the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Eggar: The permanent representative of the United Kingdom plays an active role in efforts to secure improvements in the efficiency of the United Nations and draws frequent attention to areas where wasteful expenditure could be avoided. He did so during the discussions of the organisation's budget for 1986-87. He continues to take appropriate opportunities to do so, for example, by commenting on United Nations plans to hold three separate conferences on Southern Africa costing more than £2 million which would duplicate proceedings at the United Nations itself. We have no intention of withdrawing the United Kingdom delegation from the United Nations General Assembly: not least since to do so would deprive us of influence over the United Nations' financial affairs.

Mr. Simon Garoeb

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Mr. Simon Garoeb, of Honey hill road, Bedford, a student at the national college of agricultural engineering, Silsoe, is in receipt of funds from the British Council.

Mr. Eggar: No.

United Nations Commission on Human Settlements

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his intention to rejoin the United Nations commission on human settlements.

Mr. Eggar: No decision has yet been taken on this matter.

THE ARTS

Welsh National Opera

Mr. Wigley asked the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about the production of operas by the Welsh National Opera at Llandudno; and what account he has taken of these in setting the funding of the Welsh Arts Council.

Mr. Luce: I have received no such representations. The needs of Welsh National Opera were considered along with all other claims for funds when the grant-in-aid for the Arts Council was calculated. The allocation to the Welsh Arts Council is a matter for the Arts Council.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Pattern Examination (Fees)

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the percentage increase in fees charged for pattern examination under the Weights and Measures Act in each of the years 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively.

Mr. Howard: Since 1982 fees have been based on hourly charges, and these are shown in the table. Prior to 1982 fees were fixed according to pattern type and are not therefore directly comparable.

Date	*Hourly charge*	*Increase on earlier rate*
	£	per cent.
1.1.82	22	—
1.1.83	30.25	37·5
1.1.84	32	5·8

Balance of Trade

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the balance of trade in manufactures for 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1985 trade in manufactures on a balance of payments basis is provisionally estimated to have been in deficit by £3·1 billion: an improvement of £0·7 billion compared with 1984.

Compact Discs

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he plans to support the record industry in increasing the capacity within the United Kingdom to manufacture compact discs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: My Department stands ready to support the expansion plans of this industry, like other industrial sectors, through the range of measures available.

Companies (Accounts)

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many prosecutions were undertaken in 1985 of companies which had failed to file company accounts.

Mr. Howard: There is no statutory offence by a company itself for failure to file accounts. It is the directors who are responsible, and therefore subject to prosecution for failure. Four thousand four hundred and nine directors of companies incorporated in England and Wales were prosecuted for this offence in 1985.

Foundry Industries

Mr. Lewis Stevens asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what information he has as to subsidies to the foundry industries of Spain, other European Economic Community countries and Brazil; and what effect he assesses such subsidies to have on the United Kingdom foundry industry both at home and abroad;

(2) what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the direct and indirect subsidies to the foundry industries in Spain and other countries with existing trade agreements;

(3) what action Her Majesty's Government take to seek to ensure that United Kingdom foundries do not face unfair competition from overseas; and if any further action is proposed.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department is at present reviewing complaints by the United Kingdom foundry industries, which allege unfair competition from subsidised imports. In the light of the evidence presented, my Department will consider taking up the complaints with the Commission of the European Communities, which is responsible for taking action in respect of such imports whether they come from other member states of the Community or from third countries.

Castings (Imports)

Mr. Lewis Stevens asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the value and volumes of casting imports to the United Kingdom from Spain, West Germany and Brazil for the years 1978 to 1984, inclusive.

Mr. Alan Clark: Only castings of iron and steel can be identified in the *UK Overseas Trade Statistics*. The information is as follows:

S.52/86
Value £000s
Weight MTs

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Spain							
Value	213	195	50	190	738	765	1,020
Weight	311	272	53	171	778	877	1,712
West Germany							
Value	1,395	1,560	2,208	1,709	2,538	2,714	3,514
Weight	1,728	2,435	2,665	2,315	3,406	3,600	4,779
Brazil							
Value	—	0	—	2	4	—	103
Weight	—	0	—	1	1	—	109

Source:
Data corresponding to SITC/R2 Sub-group 67·4 in the UK Overseas Trade Statistics.
Notes:
(i) — signifies nil trade, 0 signifies trade of less than £500 or 500 kg.
(ii) United Kingdom imports are valued cif.

Gas Appliances

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to introduce safety legislation for gas appliances sold in the United Kingdom; if he plans to introduce separate legislation to cover the sale of gas cookers; how many accidents have occurred in each of the last three years involving uncertified imported gas cookers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *10*]: I am considering whether regulations are necessary for gas appliances. I am dealing with cookers first, because this is the area in which most consumer complaints have arisen. I announced on 13 December that new regulations were to be introduced soon to ensure that traders selling both new and secondhand gas cookers must be sure that they meet proper safety standards.

Figures on accidents involving uncertified imported gas cookers are not available.

The cost of collecting such information would be prohibitive. I do, however, have figures for accidents involving all gas cookers in 1983 and 1984, collected by the accident surveillance system, and I shall send these to the hon. Member.

Cotton Velvet

Mr. Peter Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) at what level of imports agreement has been reached for the import of cotton velvet (category 32) from Turkey in the recent voluntary restraint agreement;

(2) on which date a voluntary restraint agreement regarding imports of cotton velvet (category 32) from Turkey was reached.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, February 1986, c. *9*]: Turkey agreed on 13 December 1985 to restrain for a two-year period from 1 January 1986 the export to the markets of the Community of a number of textile products including restraint on cotton velvet products in the United Kingdom. The agreement is an informal one, the details of which are not published.

ENERGY

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much nuclear fuel, in tonnes per year, has been processed annually in each of the last 20 years at Dounreay.

Mr. Goodlad: I am advised by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority that the amount of nuclear fuel in tonnes processed in the Dounreay reprocessing facilities in each of the last 20 years is:

Year	*Tonnes*
1966	0·756
1967	0·446
1968	0·408
1969	0·737
1970	0·420
1971	0·635
1972	0·628
1973	0·425
1974	0·588
1975	0·080
1976	—
1977	—
1978	—
1979	0·851
1980	1·181
1981	0·942
1982	1·623
1983	—
1984	1·742
1985	2·422

TRANSPORT

Aircraft Air Misses (RAF Upper Heyford)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many near misses have been reported to the Civil Aviation Authority between *(a)* civil powered aircraft, *(b)* gliders, *(c)* British military aircraft and *(d)* United States Air Force or United States Navy aircraft within the proposed special rules zone around Royal Air Force Upper Heyford within (i) the last 12 months and (ii) the last five years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The statistics for air misses in the Upper Heyford area are:

	Existing radar advisory service zone	*Proposed mandatory radio area (included in Column 1)*
Last 12 months		
USAF *v* Gliders	2	2
Last 5 years (including the above)		
USAF *v* Gliders	6	5
USAF *v* Civil powered	5	4
RAF *v* Civil powered	2	—
Civil powered *v* Civil powered	1	—
Civil powered *v* Glider	1	—

Note: All figures relate to category A, B and C air misses.

Marylebone Station

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Transport why he does not intend to issue observations on the petition presented on 25 January 1985 by the hon. Member for Brent, South relating to Marylebone station.

Mr. David Mitchell: Because, as the hon. Member knows, the period for submitting objections to the London Regional Passengers' Committee had already been extended; and in any closure proposal where there are objections, my right hon. Friend is under a statutory duty to consider all relevant factors before reaching a decision. Meanwhile, it would of course be wrong for him to take any view of the merits of the case.

DVLC (Records)

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, upon disqualification, a driver's record of conviction is expunged at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No, but when a licence is issued after a period of disqualification, endorsements which led to disqualification under the penalty points scheme are not shown on the licence or retained in the computer record. Details of disqualification itself and certain other endorsements for more serious offences remain (for four or 11 years).

Heilink (Heathrow-Gatwick)

Mr. Wolfson asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received the decision of the Civil Aviation Authority on the application by British Caledonian to continue the helilink between Heathrow and Gatwick airports; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Civil Aviation Authority has today announced its decision to grant British Caledonian's application. The authority has referred the matter to my right hon. Friend under section 17(1)*(d)* of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, which requires it to give notice to him of any matter of special interest to him by reason of the fact that it involves noise, vibration, pollution and other disturbance.

My right hon. Friend will now consider the authority's decision and the reasons for it, together with all the evidence submitted to the hearing and the transcript of proceedings. If any interested parties wish to make further representations in the light of the authority's decision, he would be prepared to consider these, provided they are submitted to him by 28 February.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who represented Her Majesty's Government at the international fund for agricultural development's governing body meeting in Rome last week; what policy objectives were pursued; and if he will make a statement on the outcome.

Mr. Raison: The United Kingdom was represented by its alternate governor, Mr. K. G. W. Frost, who is head of international financial institutions department in the Overseas Development administration.

The delegation was instructed to work for the completion of IFAD's second replenishment negotiations; to approve the arrangements bringing into effect the new special programme for African countries suffering from drought and desertification; and to approve IFAD's programme of work and budget for 1986.

All these aims were achieved. We welcome in particular the conclusion of the replenishment, which provides some measure of certainty for the future of the fund although at a relatively modest level.

The provisional total of category I (US$274 million) and category II (US$186 million) contributions to the second replenishment in US$460 million. This figure could be increased slightly during the coming two weeks if the category II countries were able to provide more money. In this case category I's contribution would rise in the same proportion. As in the first replenishment, the British share of the category I total is 4·79 per cent. The cost to the aid programme, if the category's total does not rise, is likely to be £9·23 million, spread over several years.

International Development Association

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the eighth replenishment of the International Development Association.

Mr. Raison: We want to see a substantial replenishment, and we hope that the International Development Association will thereby be able to continue its important support for longer-term investment and economic reform in the poorest countries.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome

of the meeting of the International Development Association in Paris on January 27 and 28; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: Discussion at the meeting covered the possible size of the eighth replenishment, the allocation of resources to different purposes and groups of recipients, and the terms to be applied to credits. Discussions will resume in Washington in April.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who represented the United Kingdom at the International Development Association deputies' meeting in Paris on 27 and 28 January.

Mr. Raison: The United Kingdom was represented by Mr. J. L. F. Buist, the under secretary in the Overseas Development Association responsible for multilateral aid.

Afghan War (Refugees)

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what humanitarian aid is being given to refugees from the Afghan war.

Mr. Raison: In 1985 we contributed some £5·3 million to assist refugees from the Afghan war in response to special appeals from international and British voluntary agencies. In addition, the European Community agreed to provide food aid worth about £7 million from the 1985 programme for delivery in 1986; Britain's share of the Community action was some £1·4 million.

The level of assistance to be provided in 1986 is still under consideration although we have already contributed £4,000 through the Save the Children Fund.

Nicaragua (Loan)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what voting instructions he has given the United Kingdom representative at the Inter American Development Bank for the meeting on 5 March to discuss a loan to Nicaragua; what discussions he has held with the United States Administration concerning the loan; if he will place in the Library a copy of the report prepared by the Inter American Development Bank for the meeting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: In due course instructions will be sent to the executive director of the constituency containing the United Kingdom. As I said in answer to the right hon. Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) on 20 January 1986, at col. 20, it is not our policy to disclose such instructions.

I have had no discussions with the US Administration about the Nicaraguan loan application.

The document already circulated to the board is among those classed by the bank as not for public use. I cannot therefore place a copy in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephone Faults

Mr. Harrison asked the Lord Privy Seal how many telephone complaints have been registered in the Palace of Westminster; and how many faults have been reported in each year since 1969.

Mr. Biffen [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1986, c. *631*]: Details with regard to complaints and faults for every year since 1969 could be produced only at disproportionate cost. During the financial year 1984-85 (April 1984-March 1985) 23 telephone complaints were received. During the same period the number of faults reported on the Palace of Westminster telephone exchange were as follows:

	Number
Faults on telephones and associated items	2,194
Faults reported but no faults found	648
Faults reported and found to be user error	111
Total	2,953

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Richard Holt asked the Paymaster General what training, experience, commercial or industrial knowledge is required before a panellist is appointed to an industrial tribunal.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Lay members of industrial tribunals are chosen for their knowledge and practical experience of industrial relations. Industrial tribunal chairmen in England and Wales are appointed by my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and in Scotland by the Lord President of the Court of Session. They must be barristers, advocates or solicitors of at least seven years' standing.

Training Costs

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General what is the net Exchequer cost per person covered by training in industry and YTS.

Mr. Trippier: The net Exchequer cost of YTS per filled place in 1985-86 is likely to be in the range £1,400 to £1,600 per annum. The size of this range indicates the considerable uncertainty that attaches to estimates of net Exchequer costs, because of the number of assumptions that are involved.

Training in industry comprises a collection of separate small schemes. Due to the different functions of these schemes, and their small scale, no estimate of aggregate net Exchequer cost is available.

Pay (Statistics)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General (1) what information he has as to the percentage of the adult employed labour force earning below (i) £72·53, (ii) £77 and (iii) £102·40 per week;

(2) what information he has as to the percentage of the adult male employed labour force earning below (i) £72·53, (ii) £77 and (iii) £102·40 per week.

Mr. Lang: Information is not available relating to the precise values requested. However, details of the percentage of full-time adult employees and of full-time adult male employees with gross weekly earnings below stated amounts at regular £5 and £10 intervals, including £70, £75, £80, £110, are published in respect of April 1985 in table 38 of "New Earnings Survey 1985", part B, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General what level of average gross weekly earnings is exceeded by 90 per cent. of *(a)* employed adults and *(b)* employed adult males.

Mr. Lang: Information on the level of gross weekly earnings exceeded by 90 per cent. of full-time adult employees and of full-time adult male employees in April 1985 is published in table 1 of the report, "New Earnings Survey 1985," part A, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Low Pay

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General if he will now introduce a formal definition of low pay.

Mr. Lang: No. I do not believe that any single definition of low pay would be generally supported. Nor do I believe that the introduction of a definition by the Government would serve any useful purpose.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General if he will publish a table showing the rate of unemployment among the following standard groups of people as recorded in the latest available general household survey together with any other available information on the rate of unemployment by social or employment class: professional, employers and managers, intermediate non-manual, skilled manual, own account non-professional, semi-skilled manual, personal service and unskilled manual.

Mr. Lang: Information from the general household survey on unemployment by socio-economic group has been published in tables 7.28 and 7.29 "General Household Survey 1983" which is available in the Library. The following table gives figures for the groups requested from the 1984 labour force survey.

Unemployment by previous occupation
Great Britain: Spring 1984

Occupation	*Number Unemployed* (Thousands)*	*Unemployed as a percentage of total economically active in occupational group*
Professional	26	2
Employers and managers	126	4
Intermediate and junior non-manual	433	6
Skilled manual	435	9
Own account non-professional	93	6
Semi-skilled manual	356	12
Personal service	138	9
Unskilled manual	206	13
Inadequately described/armed forces	28	12

The figures exclude 1,064,000 unemployed people who either had never had a job, or who had left their last job more than three years ago and were not asked about their previous occupation.

* People without a paid job and seeking work during the reference week of the survey.

Trade Unions (Membership)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Paymaster General what information he has concerning the total membership of recognised trade unions in the different regions of the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The latest available information on the membership of trade unions is published in the January issue of *Employment Gazette*. Trade unions are asked to provide only national figures and regional analyses of the data are not therefore possible.

Strikes

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Paymaster General what information he has concerning the total number of working days lost to strike action in each region of the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The available information requested is as follows. A regional breakdown of the figure for 1985 is not yet available.

Working days lost through stoppages of work due to industrial disputes: 1975-1984
Thousands

	1975	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
South East	964	512	1,839	2,683	4,487	439	843	1,220	962	1,522
East Anglia	40	20	159	115	548	58	80	109	57	87
South West	195	87	298	182	2,423	117	171	170	88	393
West Midlands	1,095	718	2,141	1,299	4,199	838	613	471	289	1,368
East Midlands	208	161	533	270	2,351	725	116	319	196	2,908
Yorkshire and Humberside	489	214	792	799	3,115	2,832	449	575	415	9,354
North West	765	549	1,934	1,983	4,516	533	692	989	765	1,381
North	1,004	267	698	481	2,164	2,006	341	447	241	4,211
Wales	255	299	667	444	1,642	2,918	292	283	353	3,527
Scotland	753	413	935	886	3,298	1,447	599	634	308	2,333
Northern Ireland	245	45	146	264	730	49	69	97	79	52
United Kingdom	6,012	3,284	10,142	9,405	29,474	11,964	4,266	5,313	3,754	27,135

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Paymaster General what information he has concerning the total cost in lost production due to strike action in each region of the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not have the information requested.

Careers Services

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Paymaster General whether reports on the careers services provided by individual local education authorities in England, produced by his Department's careers service inspectorate, can be made available to hon. Members.

Mr. Trippier: A copy of each inspection report is sent to the chairman of the education committee of the local authority concerned and discussed with me six months later. A copy of each report produced since October 1985 is now available in the Library.

Cash Limits

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Paymaster General whether any change will be made to the cash limits for the Department of Employment group.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the cash limit for Class IV, Vote 15, (Manpower Services Commission) will be increased by £19 million from £1,344908,000 to £1,363,908,000 to cover extra requirements for YTS and for new pilot schemes for the long-term unemployed; and the cash limit for Class IV, Vote 16 (Department of Employment administration) will be increased by £2,052,000 from £248,960,000 to £251,012,000 to cover extra costs of £6 million for administration of the unemployment benefit service, partly offset by extra receipts totalling £3,948,000 from the national insurance fund (although this offset will not reduce public expenditure). These cash limit increases are more than fully offset by a reduction of £28 million in the cash limit for Class IV, Vote 12, (Labour market services) from £865,950,000 to £837,950,000 reflecting expected savings on the community programme, so no net increase in public expenditure is involved.

ENVIRONMENT

Town and Parish Councils

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount raised by precepting parish or town councils in 1985-86.

Mrs. Rumbold: From information provided by local authorities it is estimated that total revenue raised by parish precepts amounted to £49 million in 1985-86.

Office Blocks (Cleveland)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how many projects involving the building of new office blocks are currently in progress in Cleveland.

Sir George Young: I am advised that there are no significant projects currently in progress involving office development.

Local Authorities (Lost Revenue)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much revenue was lost by local authorities in 1984-85 by defaulting ratepayers.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on revenue lost by local authorities by defaulting ratepayers in 1984-85 is not available centrally. Total gross arrears at 31 March 1985, including arrears in respect of previous years for local authorities in England, is published by CIPFA as £361 million in "Rate collection Statistics 1984-85".

Agricultural Land (Rating)

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he gave to the feasibility of levying rates on agricultural land before the publication of "Paying for Local Government", Cmnd. 9714; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Agricultural land and buildings have been fully derated since 1929 and we do not propose to change that position.

GLC (Grant)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received an application from the Greater London council for his approval of a grant to the Thamesmead Multi-cultural Funfield Association's sports centre.

Mr. Tracey: No.

Acid Rain

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to examine the effects of acid rain in urban areas.

Mrs. Rumbold: Research is in progress by the Building Research Establishment and by external contractors on the effects of acid deposition on buildings and building materials. The Building Effects Review Group, which my Department set up to provide an up-to-date review of the subject, is expected to present an initial report by the end of the year.

Community Charges

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what appeal rights citizens will have in respect of the proposed community charges; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if those who live in more than one household during the course of any year will be required to register in each place for community charge; if guidance will be issued to those householders required to register homes; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if those required to register for community charge purposes will have to meet some residence qualifications similar to requirements for those seeking to register for electoral purposes;

(4) if those registered for community charge purposes move from the household where they are registered in the course of any year, what facility there will be for names to be removed from one register and added to another register;

(5) when a person reaches the age of 18 years and is required to register for community charge purposes, what action such a person will be required to take;

(6) if students, required to register in connection with his proposals to establish a community charge, will have a choice of registering at home or in the locality of their place of study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our proposals on how the community charge would operate are outlined in annex G of the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cmnd. 9714). Final decisions will be taken in the light of consultation.

Urban Programme

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the urban programme for 1986-87, which he announced in the *Official Report*, column 417, on 27 January, compares with expected expenditure for 1985-86; and if he will express the comparisons on the same cost basis.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *24*]: Outturn figures for 1985-86 are not yet available. The table sets out initial allocations for 1985-86 and initial allocations for 1986-87. The former are increased by the GDP deflator of 4½ per cent. to give a comparable cost basis. In the course of 1985-86 initial allocations have been supplemented by £8·25 million which became available for redistribution within the urban block.

Outturn figures often differ from allocations. Local authorities receive additional allocations to support approved urban development grant schemes.

£ million	*1985-86 (1986-87 prices) initial allocations*	*1986-87 initial allocations*
Birmingham	25·6	24·5
Hackney	12·5	11·6
Islington	10·9	10·0
Lambeth	14·1	13·1
Liverpool	25·2	22·8
Manchester/Salford	25·6	23·8
Newcastle/Gateshead	18·8	17·2
Blackburn	3·76	3·60
Bolton	3·75	3·59
Bradford	4·79	4·58
Brent	4·70	4·50
Coventry	4·49	4·30
Hammersmith and Fulham	5·88	5·63
Hull	4·67	4·47
Knowsley	3·87	3·70
Leeds	4·32	4·13
Leicester	5·67	5·43
Middlesborough	4·83	4·62
Nottingham	5·07	4·85
Oldham	3·82	3·66
Rochdale	3·76	3·60
Sandwell	4·70	4·50
Sheffield	4·19	4·01
Sunderland	3·31	3·17
Tower Hamlets	4·70	4·50
North Tyneside	3·26	3·12
South Tyneside	4·11	3·93
Wandsworth	4·70	4·50
Wirral	3·83	3·67
Wolverhampton	5·06	4·84
CRS initiatives		5·00
Total	234	225

SOCIAL SERVICES

Rent and Rates

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the average rent and average rates paid irrespective of income; and if he will also state the average rent and rates paid *(a)* by persons with an income of less than £100 per week and *(b)* by persons with an income of less than £150 per week.

Mr. Major: The figures given in the table are estimates derived from the 1983 family expenditure survey. As they are derived from a sample survey, they are subject to a margin of error.

Great Britain

Gross household income	*Average rent* £	*Average rates** £
All income levels	14·00	5·30
Income less than £100	13·20	4·40
Income less than £150	13·50	4·55

* Includes owner-occupiers.

Low Income Families

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing families and persons, as in table 6 of "Low Income Families 1981", but including Northern Ireland in the figures and updating them to 1983.

Mr. Major: I regret that this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Postgraduate Hospitals

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give figures for the London postgraduate hospitals that had their own boards of governors before reorganisation showing the total revenue and capital that each received, after allowing for loans made to the district health authority and for efficiency savings, in the three years following reorganisation; and if he will express the average annual figure for the three-year period as a percentage of the revenue and capital received by the hospitals in the last year prior to reorganisation.

Mr. Hayhoe: The 1982 reorganisation of the National Health Service resulted in a major restructuring of the boards of governors for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals. Bloomsbury health authority now manages the Royal National throat, nose and ear hospitals, the Royal National orthopaedic hospitals and St. Peter's hospitals. West Lambeth health authority now manages St. John's hospital for diseases of the skin. The remaining London postgraduates teaching hospitals are now managed by special health authorities. In addition, Hammersmith

hospital, formerly part of Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow area health authority (teaching), was given SHA status.

The table shows revenue and capital allocations made to SHAs and boards of governors for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals together with the sums contained within the allocations made to North East Thames and South East Thames regional health authorities in respect of the former boards of governors in the years 1982-83 to 1984-85. It also shows the average annual figures over this period as a percentage of the corresponding 1981-82 allocations.

I regret that the information available centrally does not include similar details for individual hospitals within the special health authorities and the groups of hospitals transferred to the regional health authorities. The right hon. Member may care to approach the health authority chairmen concerned for further details.

Special Health Authority/Boards of Governors for the London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals	*Revenue Allocation*			*£000s*	*Capital Allocation*			*£000s*
	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*Average annual allocation 1982-83 to 1984-85 as percentage of 1981-82 allocation*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*Average annual allocation 1982-83 to 1984-85 as percentage of 1981-82 allocation*
Hospitals for Sick Children	25,218	27,183	27,541	114·6	1,688	2,389	4,392	203·8
National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	14,329	15,088	15,692	111·0	1,231	2,263	1,053	175·0
Moorfields Eye Hospital	10,571	11,055	11,615	110·5	2,018	3,297	3,529	221·3
Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals	14,965	15,598	16,351	113·6	532	410	725	95·6
National Heart and Chest Hospitals	22,989	24,232	26,121	113·7	2,466	1,973	1,515	159·9
Royal Marsden Hospital	16,354	17,212	18,345	111·9	740	1,694	3,330	337·1
Queen Charlotte's Hospital for Women	8,516	8,809	*	*	408	259	*	*
Hammersmith Hospital	28,729	30,400	39,179		1,298	2,527	3,570	
Eastman Dental Hospital	3,930	4,157	4,444	111·6	900	1,126	1,940	528·8
Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospitals	6,761	7,110	7,354	114·7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospitals	9,956	10,351	10,708	112·4	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
St. Peter's Hospitals	5,992	6,205	6,419	113·9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin	2,381	2,654	2,746	110·8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

* Queen Charlotte's hospital for women was merged with Hammersmith SHA with effect from 1 April 1984. Figures for Hammersmith Hospital for 1981-82 are not available centrally.
n.a. = Not available.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the reduction in total expenditure on housing benefit, and the number of claimants affected by the adjustments in *(a)* the rent taper and *(b)* the rate taper in November 1985.

Mr. Major: It was estimated that 2·06 million households were affected by the increase in the housing benefit rate rebate taper above the needs allowance from 9 per cent. to 13 per cent. in November 1985. Some households gained, however, from the 95p real improvement to the dependent child addition to the needs allowance. The estimated net saving from these changes was £45 million for a full year (1986-87)—£57 million for the rate rebate taper change alone.

The rent rebate tapers were not adjusted in 1985.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of local authorities in which more than 50 per cent. of ratepayers are receiving housing benefit which meets 100 per cent. of their rates liability; and if he will name these authorities.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 January 1986, c. 392]: I am not aware of any such authorities although there are a number, including Knowsley, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sunderland, Birmingham and Sandwell, where more than 50 per cent. of domestic ratepayers receive a full or partial rate rebate. This information, which is readily available only for England, is derived from comparing the number of domestic hereditaments in April 1984 with the rate rebate caseload for 1984-85 as indicated on local authorities' subsidy returns.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if any persons in receipt of social security benefits and currently having mortgage interest paid by his Department, in whole or in part, will lose any part of such payment under his proposed social security changes.

Mr. Newton: As paragraph 3.41 of the White Paper "Reform of Social Security, Programme for Action" (Cmnd. 9691) makes clear, the Government are continuing to discuss with the building societies and other major lenders what changes might be appropriate, including the possibility of a limit on the proportion of mortgage interest which would be met during an initial period in receipt of benefit. Any firm proposals will be announced in due course.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for

voluntary bodies and organisations and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: The Health Education Council is the only non-departmental public body funded by the Department which makes grants to voluntary organisations. The Health Education Council received £8·9 million in 1984-85 from the DHSS.

Lead (Cosmetics and Medicines)

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information his chief medical officer has received as to the prevalence of conditions caused by lead contained in privately-imported cosmetics and medicines used by members of the Asian community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: The general issue of eye cosmetics and medicines from the Indian subcontinent was discussed in chapter 5 of the report of a DHSS working party on lead in the environment—"Lead and Health" (1980). This includes references to the few known studies of any health problems linked to the use of these substances.

Registered Homes

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) which local health authorities have so far failed to appoint a registration officer under the Registered Homes Act 1984; and whether any reasons have been given for this delay;

(2) if it has been decided whether the implementation of the Registered Homes Act 1984 and the responsibility for registered homes should be a matter for the housing department or the social services department of local authorities.

(3) if he is satisfied with the operation by local health authorities of the Registered Homes Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: Under the terms of the Registered Homes Act 1984, residential care homes are registered by local social services authorities and nursing homes by district health authorities.

I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 30 October 1985, at column *578*, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 28 January, at column *487*.

Drug Control

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report*, all applications received by his Department for drug control and assistance projects, local authority by local authority; and what has been granted.

Mr. Whitney: Tables listing all applications received under the drugs initiative and those applications which have been approved have been placed in the Library.

"Violence Against Women"

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to announce his response to the document entitled "Violence Against Women", which has been submitted to him by the National Women's Commission.

Mr. Whitney: The report "Violence Against Women" was recently sent to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, by the co-chairman of the Women's National Commission, my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Mrs. Fenner). The report's recommendations concerning women's aid refuges are being carefully studied and inquiries made of the Department of the Environment concerning urban programme funding. I expect to be able to respond shortly to the commission's co-chairman. I shall write to the hon. Lady at the same time.

Kidney Transplants

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services pursuant to the answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 346, about the numbers awaiting kidney transplants in the west midlands, what proposals he has to improve facilities in the region to enable more patients to receive treatment.

Mr. Whitney: The provision of facilities for the treatment of kidney patients is a health authority responsibility. I am advised that the West Midlands regional health authority has made financial provision for an additional 10 kidney transplant operations to be performed in 1986-87. In 1987-88 a new transplant unit is scheduled to open in Coventry with a planned eventual work load of some 20 kidney transplant operations a year. As the hon. Lady will be aware, a renal unit will also open at the New Cross hospital, Wolverhampton, in 1986-87 for the treatment of dialysis patients.

Hospitals (Hygiene)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many health authorities have supplied information regarding food hygiene following the letter of 3 October 1985 from Mr. Victor Page to regional general managers; and, of those who have replied, how many *(a)* have satisfactory procedures to ensure that statutory procedures are observed, *(b)* have invited environmental health officers to inspect all their hospitals and given them open access, *(c)* have had senior management consider the reports of environmental health officers immediately and *(d)* have referred to cost as being a reason for delaying or not carrying out the recommendations of the environmental health officers.

Mr. Hayhoe: The responses from all regional health authorities give assurances that the requirements in circular HC(77) 24 on procedures, open access and consideration of environmental health officers' recommendations are observed. Eleven regions referred to the need for major kitchen refurbishments and modernisation schemes to be scheduled within the overall capital programme as a reason why it is not always possible to take immediate action on all aspects of the recommendations of environmental health officers.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will request all health authorities to ensure that any report by environmental health officers on the condition of its hospitals should be seen and discussed by members of the authority, that expenditure on hospital

hygiene and pest control should be separately identified in the hospitals' financial returns and that health authorities should at least once a year consider the question of health, safety and hygiene in the hospitals for which they are responsible;

(2) if he will request all health authorities to inform his Department when they decide to take no immediate action when advised by the environmental health officer to carry out kitchen improvements and to convey their reasons for such decisions.

Mr. Hayhoe: These matters are being considered as part of the urgent revision of the Department's guidance on food hygiene in the health service which is being carried out in the light of the recommendations of the Stanley Royd hospital report.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he has issued to hospitals regarding the advice to be given to patients and their relatives when there is a serious outbreak of food poisoning in a hospital.

Mr. Hayhoe: The hospital infection working group has been asked to advise on fresh guidance to health authorities on the management of infection control to give high priority to contingency plans for dealing with serious outbreaks, including those arising from food poisoning.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on how many occasions hospitals in which there have been outbreaks of food poisoning have refused specialist help from *(a)* environmental health officers, *(b)* the public health laboratory service or *(c)* the communicable diseases surveillance centre.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am not aware of any occasion on which such specialist help has been refused other than that referred to in the report of the Stanley Royd inquiry.

Crown Immunity

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department is estimating the cost to health authorities of the abolition of Crown immunity.

Mr. Hayhoe: We are urgently reviewing the Crown immunity of the National Health Service under the Food Act but the resource implications of removal would depend on a variety of factors which cannot immediately be assessed.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will list the bodies and institutions which have urged the lifting of Crown immunity from hospitals;

(2) from which people or institutions he has sought views on Crown immunity; and what was their advice.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to him on 28 January at column *495*.

Students (Benefits)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessments he has made of the extent to which students' incomes could be reduced resulting from the new restrictions which he has introduced on the payment of housing, unemployment and supplementary benefit to students.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish today.

Hospital and Community Health Service

Dr. Owen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the most recent estimates for changes in hospital and community health service pay and prices and input volume for 1984-85.

Mr. Hayhoe: Hospital and community health service revenue spending increased by 5·7 per cent. in 1984-85. Pay and price increases averaged 5·8 per cent. This in itself is not a useful measure of spending or services. It does not reflect the cost to the taxpayer of financing the service—which rose by 1·4 per cent.—nor does it take account of improved efficiency, which has now become a major contributor to growth in services. Health authorities achieved a 1 per cent. (£100 million) cost improvement programme in that year. Overall clinical activity rose by 2·9 per cent.

Dr. Owen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the most recent estimates for components of the hospital and community health service programme budget for 1984-85.

Mr. Hayhoe: The 1984-85 programme budget for the hospital and community health service is not yet available.

Gillick Case (Deputation)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the recent deputation to him from prominent Roman Catholics regarding the implications of the House of Lords decision in the Gillick case and on his response to the deputation.

Mr. Hayhoe: I met a deputation from the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales on 5 December last year, and am taking account of the points they raised in connection with the proposed revision of our guidance on family planning services for young people.

Gas Cookers

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he proposes to take in the proposed legislation governing the safety of such appliances to ensure that the level of special payments in respect of gas cookers takes account of any implications for their costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The guidance already issued by the Chief Adjudication Officer in circular S36/85 is consistent with the proposals concerning the safety of gas cookers, including any cost implications. A copy of the circular is in the Library.

Nurses

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for how many patients on average a nurse, working for the National Health Service, is responsible during an average working shift.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that this information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average number of hours worked per week by a nurse employed by the National Health Service.

Mr. Hayhoe: The "New Earnings Survey" contains information on hours worked by a sample of "full-time" National Health Service nursing and midwifery staff.

Including overtime, the April 1985 survey shows female staff working 37·6 hours per week on average and male staff 38·6 hours.

It should be noted that the "New Earnings Survey" definition of full-time is normal basic hours above 30 per week. The standard contracted week, exclusive of meal breaks, for National Health Service nursing and midwifery staff is 37½ hours.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the planning assumption for the purpose of his Department's estimates of the likely percentage increase in salaries for nurses in the National Health Service in the coming year; and how this compares with his Department's assumptions for the increases in National Health Service costs in general;

(2) what assumption was made, when health authority budgets were prepared for 1985-86, about the percentage increase in nurses' salaries in the current year.

Mr. Hayhoe: The cash allocations to health authorities in 1985-86 and 1986-87 have taken account of forecast increases in general inflation, but have not reflected any specific assumption about increases in the salaries of nurses or other staff. Health authorities know that they will be expected to respond to demographic change, introduce service developments, meet the costs of pay and price increases and of medical advance, from within the funds allocated to them and the additional resources generated from their cost improvement programmes.

Supplementary Benefit (Statistics)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number and rate per thousand of each category of single payments in the years 1978-1985 inclusive.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1985, c. *321-22*]: Information about the number of single payments by category is available from the "Annual Statistical Enquiry" and the details in the table relate to the years 1978 to 1983, the latest date for which information is available. The figures in the table relate to single payments made during the 12 months preceding the date of the inquiry to those in receipt of supplementary benefit at the time of the inquiry, and do not therefore record all of the single payments made during the year. Because of this the figures are indicators of changes over time rather than absolute values.

Number (nearest thousands) of single payments and rate per 1,000
1978 to 1983

Category of payment	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Clothing and Footwear						
Number	391	360	355	57	74	113
Rate per 1,000	133	126	114	15	17	26
Bedding						
Number	117	109	155	165	276	367
Rate per 1,000	40	38	50	44	65	84
Household Furniture/Equipment						
Number	120	135	146	250	419	654
Rate per 1,000	41	47	47	67	98	150
Fuel						
Number	12	20	23	13	242	25
Rate per 1,000	4	7	7	4	57	6
Removal Expenses						
Number	28	27	24	31	40	38
Rate per 1,000	10	10	8	8	9	9
Repair/Redecoration						
Number	27	28	24	22	49	92
Rate per 1,000	9	10	8	6	11	21

Notes:
1. The regulated scheme was introduced in November 1980.
2. This includes a number of payments made during the period of exceptionally severe weather early in 1982.

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries 1978 to 1983.

North Western Regional Health Authority

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the last trade-union nominated member of the North Western regional health authority ceased to sit; who replaced that member; if there are any unfilled places on the North Western regional health authority; and if he has received any nominations from trade unions to fill a place on the North Western regional health authority.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986]: There are currently two membership vacancies on North Western regional health authority. One of these relates to the place that my right hon. Friend would normally seek to fill with a member with a background in the wider trade union movement. As a result of difficulties in securing suitable nominations, this vacancy has existed since October 1984. New nominations have, however, been received recently and are being considered.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 February 1986

HOME DEPARTMENT

Naturalisation

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current delay in granting applications for naturalisation.

Mr. Waddington: The average time which it took to deal with applications for naturalisation granted in December 1985 was just under 20 months.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate for each closed prison the average number of hours a prisoner spent in his or her cell for the most recent week for which the data can be conveniently assembled.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the countries of origin of those applying for refugee status, or asylum, with the number of those applying from each country and the number of those granted refugee status or asylum from each country for the years 1981 and 1984.

Mr. Waddington: Following is the information:

Applications for Asylum in the United Kingdom 1981 and 1984

	1981			*1984*		
	Applications Received	*Granted Refugee Status*	*Granted Asylum without Refugee Status*	*Applications Received*	*Granted Refugee Status*	*Granted Asylum without Refugee Status**
Afghanistan	82	11	23	38	12	—
Algeria	1	—	—	2	—	—
Angola	4	—	—	1	—	—
Argentina	11	1	—	—	—	—
Bahrain	—	—	—	1	—	—
Bangladesh	4	—	—	5	3	—
Bolivia	1	1	—	—	—	—
Bulgaria	2	1	1	5	3	—
Burma	—	—	—	1	—	—
Cameroon	1	—	—	—	—	—
Chile	7	2	—	12	—	—
China	2	1	—	—	—	—
Colombia	6	3	2	3	5	—
Cuba	1	—	—	1	1	—
Cyprus	9	4	7	1	—	—
Czechoslovakia	55	14	7	19	5	—
Egypt	13	1	—	8	—	—
Ethiopia	90	39	3	116	9	—
El Salvador	33	13	—	2	—	—
Gambia	2	—	—	—	—	—
German Democratic Republic	1	—	—	—	—	—
Ghana	13	5	—	320	60	4
Greece	2	—	—	—	—	—
Guatemala	1	3	—	—	—	—
Guyana	—	—	1	3	1	—
Hungary	21	1	6	20	1	—
India	1	—	—	52	—	—
Iran	1,547	1,038	133	1,203	296	4
Iraq	14	20	7	321	51	—
Israel	—	1	—	2	—	—
Italy	2	—	—	—	—	—
Jordan	6	—	—	1	1	—
Kenya	1	—	—	3	—	—
Laos	1	1	—	—	—	—
Lebanon	—	—	—	27	—	—
Lesotho	—	—	—	1	—	—
Liberia	7	1	—	—	—	—
Libya	41	15	16	73	6	—
Mauritius	—	—	—	1	—	—
Malawi	5	3	—	—	—	—
Malaysia	—	—	—	2	—	—
Morocco	1	—	—	2	—	—
Nationality Doubtful	6	3	—	17	—	—
Nicaragua	1	1	—	1	—	—
Nigeria	—	—	—	44	—	—
Niger	—	—	—	6	—	—
Pakistan	79	21	2	126	7	—

	1981			1984		
	Applications Received	*Granted Refugee Status*	*Granted Asylum without Refugee Status*	*Applications Received*	*Granted Refugee Status*	*Granted Asylum without Refugee Status**
Philippines	—	—	—	1	—	—
Poland	92	4	6	92	18	—
Qatar	—	—	—	1	—	—
Romania	14	3	2	3	—	—
Rwanda	—	—	—	—	1	—
Seychelles	19	6	—	29	2	—
Sierra Leone	2	—	—	6	—	—
Somalia	11	2	—	81	3	—
South Africa	62	12	2	51	6	1
Spain	1	—	—	—	—	—
Sri Lanka	12	—	2	425	2	—
Sudan	14	2	—	56	2	—
Swaziland	1	—	—	1	—	—
Syria	—	—	1	17	3	—
Tanzania	3	—	—	4	—	—
Tibet	—	—	—	1	—	—
Togo	—	—	—	1	—	—
Tunisia	2	—	—	—	—	—
Turkey	1	—	—	48	38	—
UKPH	—	—	—	1	—	—
USA	1	—	—	—	—	—
USSR	6	2	1	2	1	—
Uganda	99	9	—	154	36	1
Upper Volta	—	—	—	1	—	—
Uruguay	6	4	—	—	—	—
Yemen (PDR)	—	—	—	5	—	—
Yugoslavia	5	1	1	5	1	—
Zaire	—	—	—	1	—	—
Zambia	—	—	—	2	—	—
Zimbabwe	—	—	—	25	—	—
Grand Total	2,425	1,249	224	3,478	574	10

* In July 1984 the category of "asylum without refugee status" was abolished. Since then all persons granted asylum have been recognised as refugees. Those granted refugee status or asylum in a particular year may have made their application in an earlier year.

Mr. Simon Garoeb

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any conditions as to his conduct have been attached to the permission for Mr. Simon Garoeb, of Honey hill road, Bedford, a student at the National College of Agricultural Engineering, Silsoe, to reside in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: No.

Police (Injuries)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many man days were lost by policemen as a result of injuries sustained whilst on duty in each of the past five years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not collected centrally.

Motoring Convictions

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records of previous motoring convictions are available to the courts.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Details of more serious offences are supplied to the National Identification Bureau, which will make information available to the courts through the prosecution. In addition, local police forces maintain their own records of offences which are not recorded by the NIB. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre will supply prosecutors with the information available to it about convictions which carry penalty points or disqualification.

Immigration

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many clearance certificates were *(a)* granted and *(b)* taken out in 1985; and how these figures compared with each of the previous five years.

Mr. Waddington: The number of entry clearances to the United Kingdom (including those for temporary purposes) issued worldwide was 641,000 in 1980, 605,000 in 1981, 545,000 in 1982, 577,000 in 1983, and 602,000 in 1984. Information for 1985 is not yet available. Information on the number of entry clearances used is not available.

Police (Entry Requirements)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the details, in metric and non-metric figures, of the minimum height and eyesight requirements of police forces referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 29 January.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The present minimum height requirements for police forces in England and Wales are as follows:

	Men cm	*Women* cm
*Avon and Somerset	172 (5.8ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*Bedfordshire	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ns)
*Cambridgeshire	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Cheshire	173 (5.8ins)	163 (5.4¼ins)

	Men cm	Women cm
*City of London	180 (5.11ins)	167½(5.6ins)
Cleveland	178 (5.10ins)	168 (5.6ins)
Cumbria	175 (5.9ins)	168 (5.6ins)
Derbyshire	177 (5.9¼ins)	168(5.6ins)
*Devon and Cornwall	175 (5.9ins)	168 (5.6ins)
Dorset	175 (5.9ins)	167½(5.6ins)
Durham	173 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Dyfed-Powys	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
*Essex	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
*Gloucestershire	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5 4ins)
*Greater Manchester	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Gwent	178 (5.10ins)	168 (5.6ins)
Hampshire	176 (5.9¼ins)	166 (5.5½ins)
*Hertfordshire	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
*Humberside	172 (5.8ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*Kent	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Lancashire	175 (5.9ins)	168 (5.6ins)
Leicestershire	172 (5.8ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*Lincolnshire	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Merseyside	172 (5.8ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*Metropolitan Police	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Norfolk	176 5.9¼ins)	165 (5.5ins)
Northamptonshire	175 (5.9ins)	165 (5.5ins)
*Northumbria	172 (5.8ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*North Wales	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
North Yorkshire	175¼(5.9ins)	167½(5.6ins)
Nottinghamshire	176 (5.9¼ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*South Wales	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
South Yorkshire	176 (5.9¼ins)	168 (5.6ins)
*Staffordshire	172 (5.8ins)	167 (5.5½ins)
*Suffolk	172 (5.8ins)	167 (5.5½ins)
*Surrey	172 (5.8ins)	162 (5.4ins)
Sussex	172 (5.8ins)	167½(5.6ins)
*Thames Valley	175 (5.9ins)	165 (5.5ins)
*Warwickshire	172 (5.8ins)	167 (5.6ins)
West Mercia	172 (5.8ins)	162 ((5.4ins)
West Midlands	176 (5.9¼ins)	166 (5.5½ins)
*West Yorkshire	172 (5.8ins)	168 (5.6ins)
Wiltshire	172 (5.8ins)	167 (5.6ins)

The normal standard of vision is defined as an unaided distant vision of not less than 6/18 in each eye (Snellens' test), correctable with approved vision aids to a standard 6/6 in one eye, 6/12 in the other and 6/6 binocularly. The forces marked with an asterisk in the table accept candidates whose vision is correctable by glasses or by contact lenses to the normal standard of vision. The other forces require a higher standard.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the category entitled animal experiments to select, develop or study the use of medicinal, dental and veterinary products and appliances contained in Cmnd. 9574, are related to cosmetic preparations for medicinal purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the categories of cosmetic experiments that will be considered by the animal procedures committee.

Mr. Mellor: The Animal Procedures Committee will be asked to examine all applications for project licences to test cosmetics products of any kind, including toiletry products such as soap, toothpaste and deodorants as well as decorative products.

Drug Addicts

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered drug addicts there are; what were the equivalent figures in 1975 and 1979; and what are the equivalent figures for Hampshire for the same periods.

Mr. Mellor: Information on narcotic drug addicts notified to the Home Office by police force area is published for the years 1978 to 1984 in tables 3.11 to 3.13 of "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs, United Kingdom, Supplementary Tables, 1984." The corresponding information requested for 1975 is given in the following table. Corresponding information for 1985 is not yet available.

Narcotic drug addicts notified to the Home Office, 1975

Number of persons

	New addicts notified during the year	*Former addicts notified during the year*	*Addicts recorded at 31 December*
United Kingdom	922	536	1,949
Hampshire police force area	31	21	61

Holloway Prison

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing improvements in the C1 unit at Holloway prison.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 January 1986, c. *324*]: A design brief for improvements to the present C1 unit has been agreed and the necessary design work is in hand. It is hoped that work will start at the end of February.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table, for each of the most recent years for which figures are available, showing the number of applicants for teaching posts with overseas teaching qualifications, the countries in which the qualifications were obtained, the number of these teachers who were granted eligibility for qualified teacher status and the number whose applications were unsuccessful.

Mr. Chris Patten: Applications for teaching posts are a matter for local authorities. The information requested is not collected by my Department. The following is the number of teachers trained overseas who have applied to my right hon. Friend for qualified teacher status in 1983, 1984 and 1985, the number of those applications which have been accepted and the number rejected.

Overseas applications for qualified teacher status in England and Wales

Country or region	1983 applications			1984 applications			1985 applications		
	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Total	Accepted	Rejected
Algeria	3	—	3	4	2	2	2	—	2
Argentina	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Australia	317	255	62	328	260	68	429	297	132
Austria	5	4	1	2	—	2	6	3	3
Bangladesh	24	13	11	28	15	13	17	10	7
Belgium	5	1	4	3	—	3	8	—	8
Brazil	1	—	1	1	—	1	1	—	1
Bulgaria	—	—	—	2	1	1	—	—	—
Cameroon	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	—	—
Canada	46	21	25	61	37	24	50	24	26
Chile	4	—	4	1	—	1	1	—	1
Colombia	6	—	6	3	—	3	—	—	—
Cyprus	—	—	—	3	2	1	5	5	—
Czechoslovakia	1	—	1	1	1	—	4	2	2
Denmark	6	5	1	5	5	—	3	2	1
Egypt	1	—	1	2	—	2	2	—	2
Finland	—	—	—	2	1	1	7	4	3
France	78	12	66	78	15	63	93	17	76
The Gambia	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Germany	70	54	16	70	48	22	101	74	27
Ghana	6	2	4	11	1	10	20	1	19
Greece	2	—	2	—	—	—	3	1	2
Guyana	1	—	1	5	—	5	4	—	4
Hong Kong	5	—	5	3	—	3	6	1	5
Iceland	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
India	107	24	83	150	34	116	171	57	114
Indonesia	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Iran	3	—	3	2	1	1	6	1	5
Iraq	2	—	2	2	—	2	6	1	5
Israel	4	—	4	6	1	5	2	—	2
Italy	25	3	22	22	3	19	30	4	26
Ivory Coast	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Japan	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Kenya	15	—	15	14	2	12	7	—	7
Lebanon	—	—	—	2	—	2	2	—	2
Malaysia	2	—	2	4	1	3	6	1	5
Malta	5	—	5	11	1	10	4	—	4
Mauritius	—	—	—	1	—	1	4	—	4
Mexico	3	—	3	1	—	1	2	1	1
Morocco	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Netherlands	13	4	9	18	6	12	18	2	16
New Zealand	176	169	7	206	192	14	305	281	24
Nigeria	7	—	7	6	—	6	10	—	10
Norway	2	—	2	2	—	2	5	2	3
Pakistan	47	25	22	46	17	29	55	16	39
Papua New Guinea	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Paraguay	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Peru	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
The Philippines	5	—	5	8	—	8	7	—	7
Poland	7	3	4	7	3	4	8	1	7
Portugal	1	—	1	1	—	1	3	—	3
Romania	1	—	1	1	—	1	5	2	3
Seychelles	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	1
Sierra Leone	3	1	2	3	—	3	5	1	4
Singapore	5	2	3	5	2	3	3	—	3
South Africa	44	33	11	38	25	13	70	31	39
Spain	18	3	15	18	1	17	10	—	10
Sri Lanka	5	1	4	5	3	2	28	13	15
Sudan	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Sweden	6	4	2	4	2	2	4	3	1
Switzerland	7	—	7	4	—	4	4	—	4
Syria	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Taiwan	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1
Tanzania	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thailand	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Tunisia	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Turkey	1	—	1	4	—	4	9	6	3
Uganda	6	2	4	4	2	2	6	2	4
USA	94	37	57	91	43	48	113	52	61
USSR	6	5	1	4	1	3	4	3	1
Venezuela	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Vietnam	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
West Indies	14	4	10	8	—	8	26	2	24
Yugoslavia	3	—	3	—	—	—	2	—	2
Zambia	1	1	—	1	—	1	3	2	1

Country or region	1983 applications			1984 applications			1985 applications		
	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Total	Accepted	Rejected	Total	Accepted	Rejected
Zimbabwe	9	3	6	19	9	10	13	2	11
Totals	1,235	693	542	1,337	737	600	1,731	927	804

Nursery Education

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to encourage the expansion of nursery accommodation for the under fives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Chapter 4 of the White Paper "Better Schools" (Cmnd. 9469) sets out the Government's policy on the education of the under-fives, including resources. While our plans for expenditure on education allow for provision attributable to the under-fives to continue within broadly the same totals as today, it is for the local education authorities to determine the scale and nature of such provision in particular areas, in the light of their assessment of local needs and priorities.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the total amount of local authority capital spending on the under-fives and *(b)* the proportion of that spending allocated to the urban programme since 1981-82, both at outturn and at 1984-85 prices.

Mr. Dunn: Urban programme data are not available in the form requested. Local authority capital expenditure on the under-fives, and education expenditure under the urban programme, in the financial years 1981-82 to 1984-85 in cash and in real terms were as follows:

*a. Local Authority Capital Expenditure on Under-Fives**

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 provisional outturn
cash	9·9	3·9	5·3	9·3
real terms‡	11·5	4·2	5·5	9·3

b. Total Urban Programme Expenditure-Education†

£ million

	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 provisional outturn
capital:				
cash terms‡	9·8	13·4	13·9	13·6
real terms‡	11·4	14·6	14·5	13·6
current:				
cash	24·7	21·9	25·3	23·0
real terms‡	28·8	23·9	26·4	23·0
total:				
cash	34·5	35·3	39·2	36·6
real terms‡	40·2	38·5	40·9	36·6

* Includes capital expenditure on under-fives made under the Urban Programme.
† No breakdown of urban programme expenditure between sectors is available.
‡ Real terms are the cash expenditure for each year repriced using the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator (base year 1984-85).

Education Expenditure

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a breakdown of local authority education spending, expressed in cash terms, 1984-85 prices, and as a percentage of total budgets, according to the following categories; nursery education, primary education, teachers' salaries, secondary education, special education, community education, further and higher education, school meals and milk, careers and health services, together with the total number of children covered in each local authority.

Mr. Chris Patten: Some of the information requested is given in "Education Statistics 1983-84 Actuals" published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which is available in the Library; some elements could be provided only at disproportionate cost; and some are unavailable.

WALES

Land Reclamation

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was spent by the Government, local authorities and the National Coal Board on land

reclamation in Wales in (i) 1975 and (ii) 1985, or the last year for which figures are available; and what acreage of land was reclaimed by each body.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Land reclamation schemes often incur expenditure in more than one year. The following information is therefore provided on the basis of schemes approved to start in the years in question.

In 1975 the Welsh Office provided 85 per cent. grant-aid to local authorities for approved expenditure on land reclamation. In that year schemes were approved involving the reclamation of 1,322 acres of derelict land by local authorities at a total cost of some £8·8 million, for which the Welsh Office provided grant-aid of £7·5 million.

The Welsh Development Agency now provides 100 per cent. grant-aid to local authorities for approved expenditure on land reclamation. In 1985 the agency approved grant-aid for schemes to reclaim 622 acres of derelict land by local authorities, at a cost of £10·6 million.

No grant-aided reclamation has been undertaken by the NCB, which normally releases its redundant sites to local authorities for reclamation.

Health Visitors

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to seek to assist health visitors in Wales to tackle their jobs in areas of social distress; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: My right hon. Friend has appointed an expert review of community nursing services in Wales, which will include the role of health visitors. I look forward to receiving its recommendations on how the full range of community nursing services may be deployed more effectively with improved care to patients and clients.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reform

Mr. Maples asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his intentions for the transfer at abolition of property owned by the GLC and MCCs.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 December 1985, c. *292-93*]: My right hon. Friend has today laid before Parliament the general order transferring property owned by the GLC and metropolitan county councils.

I announced in my reply to my hon. Friend on 5 December that we intended to make a general order applicable in all seven areas concerned and based on the principles set out in my Department's second and third property memoranda. The views of the local authority associations and successor authorities were subsequently sought on a draft of such an order. The order laid by my right hon. Friend today reflects the comments we received on that draft while adhering to the general principles that I had outlined. Property needed for the continuing provision of inherited services will pass immediately at abolition to the appropriate successor authority. Other property, including that for which the appropriate successor has not been identified, will pass initially to the residuary bodies.

The general order does not make a provision for some property of the GLC and MCCs. Such property will be dealt with by means of supplementary orders. In sending copies of the order to successor authorities and local authority associations we have also sent details of all the supplementary orders we intend to make, together with an explanatory note of the order. I have placed copies of these in the Library.

As I made clear in my reply of 5 December, the making of the general order does not rule out the bringing forward of further orders to meet more closely the wishes of successor authorities in some areas that virtually all property should pass directly to them at abolition. Proposals for such orders will now have to be put forward very quickly, however, if they are to be made before abolition. I repeat the assurance I gave on 5 December that if orders cannot be made before abolition, my right hon. Friend will give early consideration to proposals by the appropriate residuary body under section 67 of the Act so that orders can, where appropriate, be made under that section of the early transfer of property to functional successor authorities.

South Africa

93. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to seek to discourage sporting links between Britain and South Africa.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on Tuesday 28 January, at column 469.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future funding of housing co-operatives.

Sir George Young: The Government fully support the housing co-operative movement, which, by the involvement of residents in the provision and management of their own homes, can play an important role, particularly in inner urban areas, but the funding of individual co-operative schemes is a matter for the Housing Corporation, or local authorities, out of the resources available to them. As for all housing association schemes, the Housing Corporation assesses schemes put forward by co-operatives on the basis of housing need.

The Housing Corporation also makes grants to co-operatives and other associations for training and advice under section 121 of the Housing Act 1980. A decision on the total level of such funds available for 1986-87 will be made shortly. In April 1985 we introduced the co-operative promotion allowance, a special allowance paid to co-operatives to meet the extra costs which their developments normally incur. This is to be continued in 1986-87.

The Department's urban housing renewal unit will continue to promote the growth of tenant management co-operatives, which will be among the bodies eligible for start-up, training, and education grants under a provision included in the Housing and Planning Bill.

Town and Parish Councils

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of Government grant given to town and parish councils in 1985-86.

Mrs. Rumbold: Parishes do not directly receive grants within aggregate Exchequer grant (block grant, specific and supplementary grants and domestic rate relief grant). These are paid to the higher tier authorities such as districts, boroughs and counties. Information on other grants is not available centrally.

Dog Licences

Miss Fookes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the dog licence.

Mrs. Rumbold: Future arrangements for dog licensing remain under consideration following consultation on possible changes to the present system. We will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

County of Cleveland (Abolition)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to abolish the county of Cleveland.

Mrs. Rumbold: No.

Contracts (Non-commercial Clauses)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has of the prevalence of the insertion of non-commercial clauses in contracts for goods and services by local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) on 24 January, at column 338.

Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate when he intends to introduce a commencement order to bring section 1 of the Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 into force.

Mr. Tracey: During the passage of what is now the 1981 Act an undertaking was given that section 1 would not be implemented until the General Development Order 1977 had been amended to permit the removal of material from bona fide stockpiles and small or temporary mineral-working deposits. That amendment was tabled on 20 December 1985, as class XXVII of the Town and Country Planning General Development (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 1985. Subject to parliamentary approval, it will come into operation on 1 March 1986, and an order to commence section 1 will be made as soon as possible thereafter.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. Franks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authority direct labour organisations made an operating loss; how much was the loss; what was the turnover of each relevant organisation; and what was the loss as a percentage of turnover for each of the last three years.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information for the years 1982-83 and 1983-84 is available in the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy's annual publication "Direct Labour Organisations Statistics". I shall write to my hon. Friend with such information as is available for 1984-85 from those DLO annual reports which have been forwarded to my Department.

Dennis-Wild Houses

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received proposing the designation of Dennis-Wild steel-framed houses under the Housing Defects Act; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I have received no such representations.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potato Marketing Board

Mr. Henderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many members of the Potato Marketing Board appointed by him are specially conversant with the interests of consumers of potatoes.

Mr. Gummer: Four members of the Potato Marketing Board are appointed jointly by Agriculture Ministers. Two of the current appointees have experience in the merchanting and processing of potatoes, one has a background in banking and one in administration. None have been selected specifically because of their consumer interests; this is only one of several criteria which Ministers take into account in making such appointments. Ministers also appoint consumers committees to consider and report to them on the effects of marketing schemes on consumers.

EC Measures

Mr. Harris asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has recently agreed to the adoption of any EC measure by the Council before the European Legislation Committee has considered the proposals.

Mr. Jopling: Yes. On 20 December the Fisheries Council adopted a large number of measures, presented at short notice by the Commission, which provided for adjustments to the common agricultural and fisheries policies required by the accession on 1 January of Spain and Portugal. That Council also adopted three other urgent fisheries measures and a measure changing the French green rate for sheepmeat with effect from the start of the new marketing year on 6 January. I have explained to the Chairman of the European Legislation Committee the reasons for my having agreed to adoption of these measures before scrutiny was completed.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Law Charges

Mr. Hirst asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what changes he proposes to make to the 1985-86 cash limit for "Class IX, Vote 10, Law Charges, Scotland".

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote 10 will be increased by £365,000 from £13,666,000 to £14,031,000. The increase is required to take account of additional costs, including those incurred in running the Crown Office fraud and internal audit units. The increase will be a charge to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planning total of public expenditure.

PRIME MINISTER

Courts (Servicing Costs)

Mr. Soley asked the Prime Minister whether she has any plans to transfer costs incurred by the prison department in servicing the courts to the Lord Chancellor's Department; what is the estimate of those costs; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to alter the arrangements for meeting the cost of servicing the courts.

In England and Wales and in Northern Ireland the responsibility for this work is shared by the prison service and the police. In Scotland it is undertaken mainly by the police.

It is estimated that the costs incurred by the prison department in England and Wales for the financial year 1984-85 were about £34 million. Figures for Northern Ireland are expected to be about £3 million this year.

An examination of the arrangements for meeting the prison service's commitments to the courts in England and Wales is now under way. The scrutiny is being undertaken by the Cabinet Office's efficiency unit with the assistance of the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department. It will make recommendations for the more efficient, effective and economical performance of this work.

Telephone Calls (Tape Recording)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on tape recording of conversations between officials and Ministers; and how this operated in the case of Westland plc as between 10 Downing street, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk).

Urban Renewal (Bradford)

Mr. Madden asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government have any plans to provide extra financial assistance to Bradford city council to assist urban renewal in the metropolitan district; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction announced on 27 January that the resources allocated for Bradford's urban programme in 1986-87 would be £4·58 million that is the same in cash terms as for the current financial year. In addition, my hon. Friend is considering a request from the council for limited extra capital resources for the current year, and I understand that the council has bid for some of the resources available through the urban housing renewal unit, including for a community refurbishment scheme.

Ministerial Responsibility

Mr. Williams asked the Prime Minister if she will define ministerial responsibility as currently practised in respect of a Minister's responsibility for the actions of his or her officials; and if she has made any changes to the concept since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The doctrine of ministerial responsibility has been established by constitutional precedent and development over the years, and is set out in standard works about Government in this country. It is not for any particular Prime Minister to define.

Mr. Williams asked the Prime Minister what are the numbers, grades and functions of those officials whose actions are covered by her specific area of ministerial responsibility.

The Prime Minister: As to ministerial responsibility, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to my earlier reply. I have overall departmental responsibility for the Cabinet Office, including the Central Statistical Office and the Management and Personnel Office, and the Prime Minister's Office. Information about numbers, grades and functions is available from Estimates and from standard books of reference such as the "Civil Service List".

TRANSPORT

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant-aid in the last financial year for which figures are available and the size of the grant so given;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available;

(3) if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Ridley: My Department made grants in 1984-85 to the following organisations (international organisations excluded):

	£000
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	465
Community Transport	99
Medical Commission for Accident Prevention	6

I am satisfied that the grants are not used for party political purposes. No governmental agency, assuming the term excludes local authorities, nationalised industries and international agencies, receives grant-aid from the Department.

Fishing Vessels (Loss at Sea)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many United Kingdom registered fishing vessels have been lost at sea over the last 10 years; what were the causes in each case; what recommendations for future safety of fishing vessels were made by the enquiries into these losses; and what responses the Government made to each of these recommendations.

Mr. Ridley: The number and nature of casualties of fishing vessels are published in the Department's annual return "Casualties to Vessels and Accidents to Men". The following table sets out the figures of total losses of fishing vessels for the years 1975 to 1984:

	1975	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*Total*
Collisions	6	6	4	3	9	6	3	5	6	3	51
Strandings	13	9	13	6	1	8	13	12	7	8	90
Founderings/ floodings	17	15	18	19	24	18	20	22	18	22	193
Fires and explosions	9	3	1	5	2	1	10	7	6	2	46
Missing	—	—	—	2	4	1	2	—	2	2	13
Capsizings	2	1	—	1	2	4	3	3	3	2	21
Others	—	1	1	2	—	1	1	1	1	2	10
Total	47	35	37	38	42	39	52	50	43	41	424

Information about the causes and recommendations from the investigations of these 424 losses and the subsequent action by my Department is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost and effort.

All recommendations are carefully considered and, where appropriate, advice is given by means of merchant shipping notices directly to owners and skippers; by instructions to fishing vessel surveyors and by regular consultations on safety matters with representatives of the fishing industry.

Fishermen (Safety)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the number of fishermen who have undertaken firefighting and survival courses in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ridley: I have no information on the numbers of fishermen who have taken these courses.

Addingham Bypass

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement about the preferred route for the A65 Addingham bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Draft line and side roads orders for the A65 Addingham bypass will be published towards the end of this month. Copies of the proposals will be sent to my hon. Friend. A public exhibition explaining the draft proposals will be held in the Memorial Hall, Addingham from 27 February to 1 March.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Tampons

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the supply of tampons.

Mr. Howard: The report was published on 15 January.

The commission found that the market shares of Tambrands Ltd. and Southalls (Birmingham) Ltd. constitute a monopoly situation in relation to the supply of tampons.

It found, however, that since the commission's last inquiry in 1980 various changes in actual and prospective competitive conditions had occurred, notably the marked improvement and reduction in prices of external sanitary protection products (both relative to tampon prices and in real terms), the increasing importance of retailers' own brands of tampons and the increased probability of effective competition from new entrants to the tampon market. This, it considered, would be encouraged by, for example, the recent decision of the Independent Broadcasting Authority to allow television advertising of sanitary protection on an experimental basis, which would facilitate the establishment of new brands and the marketing of new external sanitary protection products in more direct competition with tampons.

However, the commission had little doubt that the two companies still had a degree of discretion in the pricing of tampons such that the prices of their main brands were higher than would be the case if their market power were less.

It was found that there were no natural or artificially created barriers to entry to the tampon market, and no restrictive or anti-competitive practices on the part of the two companies.

The commission concluded that it was more beneficial in this case that the currently rewarding profit levels should act as a magnet to attract new suppliers to the market than that the risk should be taken through measures of price regulation of harming existing smaller competitors and inhibiting new entry. The report's conclusion was therefore that the prices charged or proposed to be charged for tampons could be expected not to operate against the public interest.

I accept the commission's report. Because the commission found that the practices under reference did

not operate against the public interest, there is no statutory basis to take further action on any of these practices. I have asked the Director General of Fair Trading to release Tambrands and Southalls from their undertaking given in 1981 to provide him with certain information to enable him to monitor the tampon market.

Microelectronics

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect his Department's microelectronics application project has had on the uptake of microelectronics in Great Britain's factories.

Mr. Butcher: Surveys carried out by the independent Policy Studies Institute, have shown that in 1983 microelectronics was used in 47 per cent. of all United Kingdom factories employing 20 or more people. Preliminary figures from a further survey undertaken during 1985 indicate a significantly increased level of use. The report detailing the latest survey is in the course of preparation and will be published in the spring. In 1978, when the microelectronics applications project began, it was estimated that only 5 per cent. of companies were using microelectronics in their products and production or manufacturing processes. Since then, activities under MAP have been varied and continuous and these will have made a major contribution to the increased use of microelectronics in British industry.

Audio Tapes

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the level of imports and of import penetration of blank audio tapes.

Mr. Alan Clark: Imports of blank audio tapes in the 12 months to November 1985 were £64.9 million. Estimates of import penetration for blank audio tapes are not available, because the figures would disclose information about individual undertakings.

New Technology

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if any conclusions have been reached by the group consisting of Ministers most closely concerned, senior industrialists and representatives from the education world regarding the particular needs brought about by new technology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The final report of the Information Technology (IT) Skills Shortages Committee which I chaired was published in July 1985. Copies of this and the committee's two previous reports are available in the Libraries of both Houses. The committee made a number of recommendations for action by industry, professional institutions and trade associations, and the education system. Chief among these was the call for a new partnership between industry and education to help meet the growing demand for skilled IT manpower.

Following the report the Government announced a £43 million programme to provide some 5,000 extra engineering and technology places in higher education by the end of the decade. Industry has responded for its part by setting up the IT skills agency under the aegis of the CBI education foundation, and by a major increase in its financial support for IT-related courses in higher education.

London Borough of Ealing

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance has been given from his Department to firms operating in the London borough of Ealing in each year since 1978; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Since 1978 grants worth a total of some £5,750,000 have been offered to firms in Ealing under the main schemes of assistance. I am sure that companies in Ealing, like those elsewhere, will continue to make full use of the help that my Department offers.

Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what moneys have been paid to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. by his Department in the last seven years; and for what services.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Takeovers (Shareholders' Funds)

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to restrict the practice of a company using its shareholders' funds to provide financial assistance, directly or indirectly, to another company to purchase its own shares in a takeover bid; what representations he has received on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Section 151 of the Companies Act 1985 already prohibits companies from giving financial assistance directly or indirectly for the acquisition of its own shares. Financial assistance is defined in section 152. This general prohibition is subject to various exemptions listed in section 153. I have received two recent representations about the operation of these provisions which I am considering, but ultimately their interpretation is a matter for the court.

ENERGY

Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Energy what moneys have been paid to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. by his Department in the last seven years; and for what services.

Mr. Peter Walker: As far as payments to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd. on the privatisation programme are concerned, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

My Department has made no other payments to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sir Adam Butler asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government have yet decided whether to support the special fund set up by the International Fund for Agricultural Development to help farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mr. Raison: Now that the fundamental question of the second replenishment of IFAD's basic resources has been settled, I shall give the matter careful consideration.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretry of State for Scotland if he will publish a list showing the number and percentage of unemployed persons in each employment district in the Highland region as at the most recent date that figures are available and also the figures for the same time of year in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The tables show the number and percentage rates of unemployed registrants and claimants in each travel-to-work area in Highland region in January in each of the years 1976-86. The figures are not comparable throughout the period due to *(a)* changes in the basis of the count in October 1982 and August 1984, *(b)* the removal from the count from April 1983 of some men aged 60 and over, and *(c)* the redefinition of the TTWA's in August 1984.

For comparison purposes figures are also provided on the new and old bases at October 1982 and January 1984.

Unemployed Registrants

	Travel-to-work area													
	Dingwall		Fort William		Inverness		Nairn		Portree		Thurso		Wick	
		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.
January 1976	954	6·8	472	6·1	1,826	5·4	199	7·9	274	14·8	603	9·9	961	11·6
January 1977	1,576	11·4	648	8·0	2,158	5·8	179	7·0	232	9·4	632	9·9	1,014	11·6
January 1978	1,863	14·0	731	9·4	2,711	7·7	236	8·3	372	13·5	705	11·2	1,093	12·7
January 1979	1,932	14·5	742	9·6	2,613	7·4	260	9·2	528	19·1	692	11·0	1,218	14·1
January 1980	1,744	13·1	748	9·6	3,031	8·6	325	11·4	503	18·2	671	10·7	1,066	12·3
January 1981	1,615	12·1	1,198	15·4	3,404	9·6	444	15·6	502	18·2	731	11·7	1,198	13·9
January 1982	2,361	17·7	1,497	19·3	4,181	11·8	467	16·4	672	24·4	859	13·7	1,442	16·7
October 1982	2,624	19·7	1,286	16·6	3,789	10·7	399	14·0	548	19·9	863	13·8	1,364	15·8

Unemployed Claimants (Jobcentre based)

	Travel-to-work area													
	Dingwall		Fort William		Inverness		Nairn		Portree		Thurso		Wick	
		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.
October 1982	2,598	19·5	1,472	19·0	3,312	9·4	396	13·9	417	15·1	883	14·1	1,217	14·1
January 1983	2,864	21·5	1,801	23·2	4,065	11·5	453	15·9	591	21·4	973	15·5	1,361	15·8
January 1984	2,385	17·9	1,831	23·6	4,517	12·8	455	16·0	626	22·7	968	15·4	1,289	14·9

Unemployed Claimants (ward based)

	Travel-to-work area													
	Badenoch		Invergordon and Dingwall		Inverness		Lochaber		Skye and Wester Ross		Sutherland		Thurso		Wick	
		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.		per cent.
January 1984	663	18·1	2,111	14·8	4,009	10·9	1,644	20·7	1,125	23·8	790	20·2	776	12·7	766	16·4
January 1985	723	19·8	3,522	24·6	4,594	12·5	1,799	22·6	1,116	23·6	1,011	25·9	836	13·7	897	19·2
January 1986	729	20·0	3,226	22·6	5,014	13·6	1,866	23·5	1,185	25·1	959	24·6	806	13·2	884	18·9

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the last 10 years for which figures are available, the amounts of money paid by his Department, whether directly or indirectly through some other agency, to organisations and bodies concerned, the amounts they received and the method of payment.

Mr. John MacKay: The provision of health education falls to the Scottish health education group nationally and to health boards locally. Their respective expenditure is funded by the Scottish Home and Health Department through financial allocations to the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service and to health boards. since 1975-76 this expenditure has been as follows:

Financial Year	Scottish Health Education Group £000	Health Boards £000
1975-76	428	258
1976-77	716	480
1977-78	780	558
1978-79	1,067	776
1979-80	1,252	900
1980-81	1,540	1,018
1981-82	1,889	1,250
1982-83	2,136	1,413
1983-84	2,386	724
1984-85	2,799	831

In addition, the Scottish Home and Health Department gives grant-aid to a number of voluntary bodies, some of which undertake some health education. The amount of grant-aid paid to the appropriate bodies is as follows:

	Scottish Committee of Action on Smoking and Health	Scottish Council on Alcohol		Royal Environmental Health Institute for Scotland
		(a) Headquarters Grant	†(b) Training of Volunteer Counsellors	
Financial Year	£	£	£	£
1975-76	800	15,000	—	—
1976-77	1,700	19,000	—	—
1977-78	1,500	23,750	—	—
1978-79	1,400	25,000	—	—
1979-80	2,200	40,000	10,881	—
1980-81	*11,000	46,000	12,340	—
1981-82	15,400	56,000	17,000	—
1982-83	20,500	62,000	17,500	—
1983-84	22,000	68,000	19,940	2,000
1984-85	22,990	69,300	21,000	—

Grant-aid amounting to £2,800 has been paid to date to Scottish AIDS monitor, which began during the current financial year.
* Prior to 1980-81 the Scottish Committee also received grant from the Scottish Health Education Group (then Unit).
† Grant paid by the Scottish Education Department under section 9 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968.

Parking Fines

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many persons in Scotland in each region paid parking fines in 1985;

(2) how many persons in Scotland in each region were charged in 1985 as a consequence of failure to pay parking fines within the prescribed period.

Mr. John MacKay: Information on the issue of fixed penalty notices in 1985 and the subsequent outcome is not likely to be available until July.

Projects (Liquidation)

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the projects which were drawn to the attention of the Scottish Affairs Committee in evidence by the Highlands and Islands Development Board as successes which have since gone into liquidation and give details of the losses involved.

Mr. John MacKay: None has gone into liquidation.

Examinations (Markers)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many markers are normally recruited by the Scottish Certificate of Education Board; and how many have so far been recruited for the 1986 examinations.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish Examination Board normally appoints about 3,800 markers each year for the Scottish certificate of education and certificate of sixth year studies examinations. At 30 January 1986 the number of markers recruited for the 1986 examinations was 2,492.

Health Boards (Rates)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the rates burden on the Scottish health boards in the years 1983-84 and 1984-85; and what is the figure for 1985-86.

Mr. John MacKay: In 1983-84 and 1984-85 health board expenditure on contributions in lieu of rates was £41·1 million and £43·1 million respectively. Information on 1985-86 is not yet available centrally.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures to show, for the years 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86, National Health Service revenue expenditure in Scotland for the first two years and the allocation for the current year; and if he will also give figures to show for the individual boards the additional cost of teaching and additional other costs in teaching hospitals expressed in cost terms and as cost per student.

Mr. John MacKay: Total current expenditure by health boards on hospital and community health services was £1,218·3 million in 1983-84 and £1,299·1 million in 1984-85. It is estimated that expenditure on the same basis will amount to £1,378 million in 1985-86.

The table shows the estimates made for revenue allocation purposes of the additional costs arising for individual health boards in meeting their teaching responsibilities. These costs have been expressed at 1985-86 prices as measured by the gross domestic product deflator. The cost per student calculation has been based on the additional cost of teaching only, since the estimates of additional other costs in teaching hospitals are distributed under the SHARE (Scottish Health Authorities Revenue Equalisation) calculations to teaching boards according to the proportion of the composite weighted population of Scotland served by each such board.

Health Board	1983-84 (at 1985-86 prices)			1984-85 (at 1985-86 prices)			1985-86		
	Additional cost of Teaching	Additional other costs in Teaching Hospitals	Cost per student	Additional cost of Teaching	Additional other costs in Teaching Hospitals	Cost per student	Additional cost of Teaching	Additional other costs in Teaching Hospitals	Cost per student
	(1) £'000	(2) £'000	(3) £	(4) £'000	(5) £'000	(6) £	(7) £'000	(8) £'000	(9) £
Grampian	8,733	3,398	25,384	9,498	3,514	25,463	9,513	2,409	25,641
Greater Glasgow	17,515	17,629	25,384	19,072	19,084	25,463	18,667	12,249	25,641
Lothain	13,784	7,041	25,384	14,183	7,204	25,463	14,718	4,918	25,641
Tayside	9,037	2,675	25,384	9,396	2,745	25,463	8,846	1,879	25,641

The additional costs of teaching are distributed according to the number of undergraduate medical and dental students in each teaching centre: for this purpose four dental students are counted as one medical student.

AIDS

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice the Scottish Education Department has issued to regional councils about the problem of acquired immune deficiency syndrome, particularly in regard to hygiene in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Preliminary guidance was issued by the Scottish Education Department in October 1985 in relation to children with haemophilia who may have been exposed to the HTLVIII virus. Prelimimary guidance for social work departments was also issued in January of this year. The guidance was prepared in consultation with the Scottish Home and Health department and recommended simple hygienic precautions to counter the spread of the virus. Detailed guidance is being prepared and will be issued as soon as possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Terrorism (Syria)

17. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has informed the Syrian authorities of Her Majesty's Government's concern at their support for and succour to those terrorists belonging to the Abu Nidal Group who have claimed responsibility for the incidents at Rome and Vienna airports.

Mr. Renton: During his visit to Damascus in December, my hon. Friend the Minister of State expressed grave concern to the Syrian authorities about their reported support for Abu Nidal.

Nicaragua

20. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has had any recent discussions with the United States of America concerning American involvement in Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We regularly discuss all important issues, including the situation in central America, with the United States Government. They are fully aware of our views.

40. **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken by the Council of Ministers to assist Nicaragua in the resolution of its current political problems.

Mr. Eggar: The foreign Ministers of the European Community support the Contadora process, the aim of which is to restore peace and stability and resolve the political problems of all central Americans.

Afghanistan

21. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy relating to the current situation in Afghanistan.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Only when Soviet forces leave Afghanistan will the country be free to regain its status as a sovereign, independent and truly non-aligned state. We look to the Soviet Union to open the way to a settlement on the lines of successive United Nations resolutions by agreeing to a timetable for troop withdrawal; this is the key to peace.

Middle East

22. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends making any fresh proposals designed to reduce tension in the middle east ; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We will continue to support all realistic initiatives for the peaceful resolution of the region's conflicts.

26. **Mr. Redmond** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Economic Community Foreign Ministers next propose to discuss the middle east ; and if he will make a statement.

77. **Mr. Alfred Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next discuss the problems of the middle east.

Mr. Renton: The agenda for the next EC Foreign Ministers' meeting has not yet been agreed. We and our partners stand by the principles set out in the Venice declaration and subsequent statements and are ready to support realistic initiatives to solve the region's problems.

54. **Mr. Walters** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards peace in the middle east.

83. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards Palestinian self-determination.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham).

Central America

23. **Mr. Welsh** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers is next expected to discuss the situation in Central America in the light of the Contadora initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The 12 Foreign Ministers of the member states of the European Community regularly exchange views on important issues including central America.

USSR

24. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the Foreign Minister of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Mr. Shevardnadze has accepted my invitation to visit the United Kingdom. I hope to see him here soon. No precise dates have yet been fixed for the visit.

South Africa

25. **Mr. Michie** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received in favour of sanctions against South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have received a large amount of correspondence from interested parties, both for and against the imposition of economic sanctions against South Africa.

It remains our view that general trade sanctions would not help to bring about the changes we wish to see in South Africa.

45. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he now expects to meet the United Kingdom representative on the Commonwealth eminent persons monitoring committee for further discussions on South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to meet Lord Barber, who is a member of the Commonwealth group of eminent persons in his own right and not as our representative.

47. **Mr. Torney** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next discuss its policy towards South Africa.

49. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Council of Ministers is taking to put pressure on South Africa to end apartheid.

64. **Mr. Barnett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next discuss South Africa.

67. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next consider relations with South Africa.

68. **Dr. Gilbert** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next discuss developments in South Africa.

71. **Mr. Martin** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next discuss South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen).

52. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the subjects on which Her Majesty's Government have recently made representations to the South African Government.

Mrs. Chalker: We have recently made representations to the South African Government over:

The raid on Maseru on 19 December.

The enlargement and projected independence of the Kwandebele homeland.

An appeal for the release of Dr. Renfrew Christie on humanitarian grounds.

The restrictions on border traffic with Lesotho.

75. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with Commonwealth Governments since the start of 1986 over the question of South Africa and the agreements reached at the 1985 Commonwealth conference.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend had an opportunity to discuss a range of questions with the Nigerian Foreign Minister during his visit to London on 7-9 January. The meeting of Foreign Ministers from EC and Front Line states, which my right hon. and learned Friend attended in Lusaka from 3-4 February, provided a further occasion for an exchange of views with a number of his Commonwealth colleagues.

79. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the itinerary for the Commonwealth group which is charged with promoting dialogue between South Africa and the Commonwealth.

Mrs. Chalker: The members of the Commonwealth group of eminent persons are to operate as individuals not as representatives of Governments. It is for the group to decide its own itinerary in consultation with the other parties concerned.

80. **Mr. John Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any representations from the Commonwealth group of eminent persons who are to visit South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No.

90. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the South African Government concerning the reform of the South African constitution.

Mrs. Chalker: It is not for us to prescribe changes to the South African constitution. We have, however, both separately and with our EC and Commonwealth partners, repeatedly called on the South African Government to dismantle the system of apartheid and institute a process of genuine dialogue with a view to establishing the democratic, non-racial system of government so urgently needed in that country.

Terrorism (Arab Hit Squads)

27. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being

taken in the European Economic Community to try to deal with the threat of Arab hit squads again coming to the United Kingdom and other European countries.

Mr. Renton: Following recent terrorist attacks at Rome and Vienna airports, security precautions here and in other European countries are already at a high level. If there is evidence of plans to mount a terrorist attack from any quarter then we shall of course take appropriate steps to deal with the threat. European Community Foreign Ministers agreed on 27 January to strengthen co-operation against international terrorism.

European Community Reform

28. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom's role in the European Community of the rejection by the Danish Folketing of the reforms agreed at the Luxembourg summit.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We want to see the agreement reached at the Luxembourg European Council signed and implemented as soon as possible. The Danish Government support the agreement and we hope that Denmark will ratify it, with the other member states.

Terrorism

29. **Mr. Temple-Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress being made in the struggle against international terrorism.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey).

35. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with his European colleagues to consider what action should be taken following the alleged involvement of the Governments of Libya, Syria and Iran with the terrorists who perpetrated the attacks at Rome and Vienna airports.

78. **Mr. Lawrence** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with European Economic Community Governments, and to what effect, following Colonel Gaddafi's threat made on 16 January to offer facilities for the training, arming and financing of terrorists.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. and learned Friend to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

Treaty of Rome

30. **Miss Maynard** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what date the United Kingdom Government are expected to notify the Council of Ministers about the attitude of the United Kingdom Parliament to amendments to the treaty of Rome.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom is ready to sign the document embodying the amendments to the EC treaty agreed at the European Council in Luxembourg. The changes will thereafter be subject to approval by the national Parliaments of all EC member states. We propose to introduce a Bill for this purpose as soon as is practicable.

32. **Mr. Gould** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Foreign Minister of Denmark about amendments to the treaty of Rome.

86. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has had any discussions with the Danish Foreign Minister about the future development of European Economic Community policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Danish Foreign Minister called on my right hon. and learned Friend on 22 January. He explained to him that we wished to see the agreement reached by Heads of Government in Luxembourg signed and implemented as soon as possible, that we hoped Denmark would be able to accept it too, and that we saw no prospect of reopening what had already been agreed.

46. **Mr. Pavitt** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is to be taken by the Council of Ministers following the rejection by the Danish Parliament of amendments to the treaty of Rome.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Netherlands, as President of the Council, has proposed that those 11 member states able to do so should sign the single Act incorporating the amendments on 17 February.

69. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further recommendations are being given by the Council of Ministers to amendments to the treaty of Rome.

Mrs. Chalker: Agreement on a single Act amending the treaty of Rome was reached at a meeting of Community Ministers on 27 January.

Gibraltar

31. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Gibraltar's economy and the impact upon it of the official opening of the border with Spain.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The full opening of the border with Spain has had a positive effect on the Gibraltar economy particularly in those sectors most closely related to tourism. Some 300 to 400 extra jobs have been created in the process.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

33. **Mr. Norman Hogg** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the other participating states about progress towards the signing of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

39. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the other participating states about the progress of negotiations towards a comprehensive test ban treaty; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Views on nuclear testing constraints have been exchanged periodically with the United States and the Soviet Union, participants in the trilateral negotiations which were suspended in 1980, as well as with other states.

Israel

34. **Mr. Merlyn Rees** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his discussions with the Israeli Prime Minister on his recent visit to the United Kingdom.

62. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend's discussions with Mr. Peres were useful and constructive. They focused on efforts to move towards middle east peace negotiations and conditions in the occupied territories. We reviewed briefly other regional and bilateral issues.

Iran

36. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions or advice was given to the British embassy and British officials in Iran as to the reception and acceptance of, and offers of help to, United States citizens immediately before, during and after the Iranian hostage crisis.

Mr. Renton: During the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979 the British authorities acted in close concert with the American authorities, and with their knowledge and approval. The paramount consideration throughout was the safety of American personnel in Tehran.

BBC (External Services)

37. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to change the method of financing of the external services of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: An arrangement for multi-year funding of the external services has been agreed with the BBC for the three years from 1985-86 to 1987-88. This change in the way the external services are financed follows a recommendation in the Perry report that the grants-in-aid to the external services should be determined on a multi-annual basis for the same period as the licence fee.

Strategic Defence Initiative

38. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Administration concerning the strategic defence initiative proposals.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The United States strategic defence initiative research programme is one element in the regular discussions I hold with members of the United States Administration, for example when I saw Secretary of State Shultz in December.

Iran-Iraq War

41. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during his recent middle east tour, he urged the Governments of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait to make every effort to bring a stop to the Iran-Iraq war.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Yes. The Governments of Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait fully share our view that it is in all our interests to see the Gulf conflict brought to the earliest possible end.

Nigeria (British Prisoners)

42. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are presently being held in Nigerian prisons.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There are four British citizens at present in detention in Nigeria.

Libya

43. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's relationship with Libya.

Mr. Renton: We have at present no plans to resume diplomatic relations with Libya.

Australia

44. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for relations with Australia of the recent Royal Commission report on compensation for damage done by the testing of United Kingdom nuclear devices in Australia.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Royal Commission's report was a long and detailed document. Its recommendations are being discussed with the Australian Government in a positive spirit. I see no reason why the report should damage our excellent relations with Australia.

Mr. Oscar Mpetha

48. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the Government of South Africa on behalf of Mr. Oscar Mpetha, a trade unionist, who commenced a five-year jail term in August 1985.

Mrs. Chalker: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) told the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) on 16 July 1985 there are strong humanitarian grounds for intervention in Mr. Mpetha's case. We therefore instructed Her Majesty's ambassador in South Africa to appeal to the authorities to exercise clemency. This was done on 11 June 1985 and again on 27 September 1985.

Anglo-Soviet Relations

50. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of United Kingdom-Soviet relations.

Mr. Renton: We continue to seek better relations based on fuller mutual understanding with the Soviet Union. Mr. Shevardnadze has accepted my right hon. and learned Friend's invitation to visit London, and there are plans for a continuing and active programme of Anglo-Soviet contacts at both official and ministerial level. We also welcome the prospective visit of the British group of the IPU to Moscow, led by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council.

Disarmament

51. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress at current disarmament conferences.

Mr. Renton: The United States-Soviet bilateral talks at Geneva resumed on 16 January, in the first round to follow the meeting between President Reagan and General-Secretary Gorbachev last November. We trust that further progress, building on the success of that meeting, will be made this year. At the MBFR talks in Vienna the United Kingdom delegation presented on behalf of NATO allies a new and constructive proposal on 5 December 1985 designed to break the longstanding deadlock. These talks resumed on the 30 January. There has been good progress on procedural issues at the Stockholm conference on disarmament in Europe. We hope this will lead to progress on substance during the ninth session which commenced on 28 January. At the conference on disarmament in Geneva there was limited progress in 1985 in the negotiations for a global ban on chemical weapons. The Conference reconvened on 4 February.

African National Congress

53. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further consideration he has given to meeting representatives of the African National Congress; and if he will make a statement.

58. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Her Majesty's Government continue to refuse to meet the African National Congress.

Mrs. Chalker: A senior official of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office met with the ANC in Lusaka on 3 February. The meeting was used to convey our concern that there should be an end to violence and a process of genuine dialogue between parties in South Africa.

Pakistan

55. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Pakistan.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have good relations with Pakistan.

Turkish Peace Association

56. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has discussed the continued imprisonment of members of the Turkish Peace Association with the Prime Minister of Turkey; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I discussed the whole question of human rights, including the Turkish Peace Association, with the Turkish Government during my visit to Turkey last year and have done so on a number of subsequent occasions. I look forward to Mr. Ozal's visit here later this month. We shall welcome the progress made by his Government on human rights while, as on previous occasions, expressing our hope that Turkey will continue its efforts to achieve full normalisation in these matters.

Irish Republic (Terrorism Convention)

57. **Mr. Stanbrook** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the Irish Republic to become a signatory of the European convention for the suppression of terrorism.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on 20 January, the Government of the Republic of Ireland announced in the joint communiqué on 15 November 1985 (Cmnd. 9657) their intention to accede to the European convention on the suppression of terrorism as soon as possible.

EC Council of Ministers (Veto)

59. **Sir Russell Johnston** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions, on what subjects and by which countries the veto has been formally exercised in the Council of Ministers since 1973.

Mrs. Chalker: There have been many occasions when decisions which could have been taken by majority vote have been deferred because one or more member state was opposed to them. It is not possible to make a clear distinction between those occasions when the Luxembourg compromise was formally invoked and those where it was tacitly applied.

Turkey

60. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to seek to pay an official visit to Turkey during the current year.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend made an official visit to Turkey in February last year. He has no current plans to pay a further visit in 1986. We look forward to the official visit to the United Kingdom of the Turkish Prime Minister, later this month.

82. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he discussed human rights during the visit of the Prime Minister of Turkey to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already made clear we look forward to holding wide ranging talks with Mr. Ozal later this month. My right hon. and learned Friend will welcome the progress made by his Government on human rights, while, as on previous occasions, expressing our hope that Turkey will continue its efforts in this area.

EC (Policy Development)

61. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further proposals he intends to place before his European Community partners for the development of Community policies.

Mrs. Chalker: We shall continue to work for early completion of the common market, improvements in world trade rules, reform of the common agricultural policy and strengthened co-operation in foreign policy.

EC (Co-ordination and Co-operation)

63. **Mr. Bell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what areas he expects greater co-ordination and co-operation between European Economic Community member states in the next 12 months.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: EC Heads of Government agreed last December that member states would aim to complete a genuine internal market by 1992; to strengthen co-operation in foreign policy; to improve Community decision-taking; to reduce constraints on small and medium-size undertakings; and to study the conditions for establishing non-inflationary growth.

Indonesia

65. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the ambassador of Indonesia; and what subjects were discussed.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I received the new Indonesian ambassador for an introductory call on 22 January. We discussed bilateral and regional issues.

Hong Kong

66. **Mr. Pendry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Hong Kong to discuss arrangements for the future implementation of the agreement with China on the transfer of sovereignty.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no plans to visit Hong Kong in the immediate future. My hon. Friend the Minister of State the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) visited Hong Kong in October 1985 and again on 23-24 January. I am glad to be able to report that the implementation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration is proceeding smoothly.

Chemical Weapons

70. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had on chemical weapons in the light of the United Kingdom's chairmanship of the chemical weapons committee of the conference of chemical weapons and disarmament.

Mr. Renton: We confer regularly on arms control topics with allies and in contacts with other countries. We have emphasised the high priority to be given to the early conclusion of a verifiable global ban on all chemical weapons. We very much hope that United Kingdom chairmanship of the Committee on Chemical Weapons at the conference on disarmament will enable substantial progress to be made in the negotiations this year.

European Act

72. **Mr. TeddyTaylor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the consequences for the European Act of the decision of the Parliament of Denmark to reject it; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Danish Government, at the request of its Parliament, is to hold a referendum to determine Denmark's position on the outcome of the inter-governmental conference. We naturally hope that the consequence of the decision to hold a referendum will be to endorse the outcome of the conference.

Uganda

73. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the high commissioner for Uganda; and what matters were discussed.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I last saw the Ugandan High Commissioner in Nassau last October, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) gave a farewell luncheon for him on 6 November. His successor has not yet taken up his new post in London.

A variety of matters were discussed on these occasions.

EC (Treaty Reform)

74. **Mr. George Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to introduce legislation to implement the treaty reforms agreed at the recent European Economic Community intergovernmental conference.

Mrs. Chalker: We will introduce a Bill as soon as all reserves are lifted. The text of the single European Act incorporating the proposed changes was placed in the Library and Vote office last week.

Gulf War

76. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest developments in the Gulf war.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We deplore the continuation of this tragic and wasteful conflict which is now well into its sixth year. We continue to support the United Nations Secretary-General and his special representative Mr. Olof Palme in their efforts to find a peaceful solution. We will do all we can to help bring about the earliest possible settlement.

East-West Relations

81. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of East-West relations.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We continue to work for better East-West relations. We welcomed the successful meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev, which has helped to establish a measure of understanding between the two leaders. It lends hope for progress in the resolution

of the differences between East and West on arms control, regional problems and human rights. We will play a full and active part in this process.

Luxembourg Agreement (Denmark)

84. **Mr. Buchan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place in the Council of Ministers following the rejection by the Danish Parliament of the Luxembourg agreement.

Mrs. Chalker: There was discussion on 27 January in the Foreign Affairs Council, where I represented the United Kingdom. I refer the hon. Member to my statement of 30 January, at column 1106.

Israeli-Jordan Relations

85. **Dr. M. S. Miller** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what indications he had from King Hussein during his recent visit to London regarding his policy towards entering direct negotiations with Israel.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I expect King Hussein to continue his efforts, which have our support, to make progress towards negotiations with Israel within an international framework.

EC (Foreign Policy)

87. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent progress towards closer co-operation in foreign policy in the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: Treaty provisions on co-operation in the sphere of Foreign Policy based on a United Kingdom initiative were agreed at the inter-governmental conference, as my right hon. and learned Friend reported to the House on 18 December. I refer the hon. Member to the evidence which my right hon. and learned Friend gave on this subject to the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on 11 December. I understand that the Select Committee has placed an uncorrected transcript of the evidence in the Library of the House and that it will be published in due course.

Nepal (Royal Visit)

88. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Minister will be accompanying Her Majesty the Queen on the forthcoming visit to Nepal.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall be accompanying Her Majesty the Queen on the forthcoming state visit to Nepal.

Ascension Island

89. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the development of Ascension Island.

Mr. Eggar: The dependent territory of Ascension island is an important communications centre and a vital link between the United Kingdom and the Falkland Islands. It consists of a largely barren island peak of volcanic rock and has no indigenous inhabitants. Normal development criteria do not therefore apply and the territory receives no aid from us.

Lesotho

91. **Dame Judith Hart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has had with Major General Justin Lekhanya since the coup in Lesotho; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Our High Commissioner and members of other diplomatic missions met General Lekhanya and other members of the Military Council and Council of Ministers at the opening of the High Court session on 3 February. We have normal relations with the new Lesotho Government.

Vietnamese Refugees

92. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Vietnamese refugees are currently in *(a)* open and *(b)* closed camps in Hong Kong.

Mr. Renton: On 27 January 4,353 Vietnamese refugees were in open camps and 4,842 in closed camps in Hong Kong.

Vietnam

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has of the denial of human rights in Vietnam; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Human rights violations in Vietnam, of which we are aware, include detention without trial in "re-education" camps, persecution of Buddhists and Catholics, harassment of intellectuals, and discrimination against ethnic minorities. We deplore all such abuses. Our Representative at the 41st Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1985 drew attention to these violations. We plan to express our concern again at Vietnam's poor record at this year's meeting.

Polish Nationals (Visas)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the arrangements that are currently in existence in Poland for the issue of visas to Polish residents wanting to visit the United Kingdom.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Yes.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Deterrent

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the current value both in financial terms and as a percentage of total expenditure on the replacement of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent, of the amount of work and materials which will be provided from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Approximately 55 per cent., or over £5,100 million by value, of the total estimated cost of Trident (£9,285 million at 1984-85 prices and at £1=$1.38) is planned to be spent in the United Kingdom.

Cammell Laird

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the vessels, giving their type, which are under construction at Cammell Laird; when the order for each was placed; which were placed on the basis of competitive tendering; and, in each such case, which other yards competed for the order;

(2) if he will list the naval construction contracts which have been placed with Cammell Laird since 1979 following a competitive tendering exercise and in which wider and more relevant factors were taken into consideration before deciding where to place the order.

Mr. Lee: Since May 1979 the following orders have been placed with Cammell Laird:

Vessel—SSK-02 to 04
Order date—3 January 1986

The reasons for placing this order with Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd/Cammell Laird were given by me on 14 January 1986 (*Official Report*, column 913). The other firms tendering for this contract were Yarrow Shipbuilders and Scott Lithgow.

Vessel—Type 22-13
Order date—29 January 1985

The reasons for placing this order with Cammell Laird were given by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Defence on 28 January 1985 (*Official Report*, column 21). Swan Hunter and Vosper Thorneycroft also tendered for this contract.

Fleet

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Defence which ships he expects to leave the active fleet during 1986.

Mr. Stanley: The ships which, on present plans, will be withdrawn from the active Fleet during 1986 are:

HMS	*Class*
Glamorgan	County Class Destroyer
Leander	Leander Class Frigate
Galatea	Leander Class Frigate
Yarmouth	Rothesay Class Frigate
Orpheus	Oberon Class Submarine
Oberon	Oberon Class Submarine
Hildeston	TON Class Minehunter
Bickington	TON Class Minesweeper
Alfreston	TON Class Minesweeper
Hodgeston	TON Class Minesweeper
Stubbington	TON Class Minesweeper
Walkerton	TON Class Minesweeper
Hydra	Ocean Survey Ship

Certain of these ships will continue to be available at standby status where they will remain declared to NATO.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the effect of a 10 per cent. increase in personal tax allowances on the net weekly income of single people, married couples and married couples with two children in 1986-87 (on the basis of the latest forecast under the Industry Act 1975) for those on 50 per cent., 75 per cent., 100 per cent., 150 per cent., 200 per cent. and 500 per cent of average earnings;

(2) what is his estimate of the effect of a 2p cut in the basic rate of income tax on the net weekly income of single people, married couples and married couples with two children in 1986-87 (on the basis of the latest forecast under the Industry Act 1975) for those on 50 per cent., 75 per cent., 100 per cent., 150 per cent., 200 per cent. and 500 per cent of national average earnings.

Mr Moore: The information requested is as follows.

Increase in net income from a reduction of 2p in basic rate*

Multiples of Average Earnings	(£ per week) ½	¾	1	1½	2	3
Single person	1·24	2·31	3·38	5·52	6·62	6·62
Married couple † ‡	0·73	1·80	2·87	5·01	6·62	6·62

Increase in net income from 10 per cent. increase in allowances*

Multiples of Average Earnings	(£ per week) ½	¾	1	1½	2	3
Single person	1·27	1·27	1·27	1·27	1·69	2·54
Married couple† ‡	2·02	2·02	2·02	2·02	2·69	4·04

* Calculated for 1986-87 assuming that the proposed changes are applied on top of statutory indexation of the 1985-86 tax regime. The change in net income is calculated by comparison with the indexed tax regime.
† Assuming that the wife has no earned income.
‡ Income tax liability is unaffected by the number of children.

VAT

Mr. Maclean asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now implement the provisions of article 25(11) of the sixth Council directive of 17 May 1977 which exempts small farmers from the requirement to complete value added tax returns as is the case in most European Community countries.

Mr. Brooke: No. The flat rate scheme for farmers provided by article 25 of the sixth Council directive is not appropriate or necessary in the United Kingdom. Unlike most other member states, the United Kingdom zero-rates agricultural products and much associated expenditure such as animal feeding stuffs and seeds. For other purchases, where appropriate, farmers are able to recover in full the VAT incurred. The United Kingdom VAT registration threshold of £19,500, which is one of the

highest in the Community, already relieves small farmers if they so wish from the requirement to be registered and complete VAT returns.

Financial Guarantees

Mr. Cohen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the current financial guarantees relying on funds provided by Parliament agreed to by the Bank of England; and what are the amounts involved.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There is none.

Income Tax (Self Assessment)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to moving to a system of self assessment for income tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: This is one of the subjects which will be considered in the forthcoming Green Paper on the reform of personal taxation.

Charities (Donations)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to make contributions to charities and non-profit making organisations tax deductible.

Mr. Moore: Tax relief is already available for payments to charities under deeds of covenant.

Capital Transfer Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of raising the relief from capital transfer tax of business assets to 100 per cent.; and how many businesses were liable for such tax in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore: The full year cost is estimated to be £20 million. It is estimated that in 1985-86, capital transfer tax will be paid on business assets included in some 150 discretionary trusts and 1,500 transfers on death. Information is not available upon which to base estimates of the number of lifetime transfers involving business assets.

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the total number of individuals who would be removed from income tax by the raising of personal income tax thresholds by 10 per cent. above the current rate of inflation; and if he will estimate the total loss in revenue which would accrue to the Exchequer from such a move;

(2) what percentage of average earnings has been represented by personal income tax allowances in each of the last 20 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such allowances in each of those years on the previous year's figure.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Westland plc

Mr. Dalyell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the subsequently published letters between Ministers relating to Westland plc were copied to him or other Ministers of his Department; and what action was taken as a result.

Mr. MacGregor: As the letters themselves make clear, copies were sent to me. There was no need for me to take any action.

Kleinwort, Benson Ltd

Mr. Neillst asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what moneys have been paid to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd by his Department in the last seven years; and for what services.

Mr. Moore: Payments made to individual financial advisers in respect of work carried out for the Government are generally treated as commercially confidential. The work done for the Government by Kleinwort, Benson Ltd in the privatisation programme up to June 1985 was detailed in the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) on 3 April 1984, at columns 451-54, and 12 June 1985, at columns *497-98*, respectively and to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 24 May 1985 at columns 562-66. Since then, the Treasury has sold its residual shareholdings in Britoil plc and Cable and Wireless plc. Kleinwort, Benson Ltd acted as one of the underwriters in both these sales.

Lodging Allowances

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the regulations governing exemption from tax on lodging allowances; what has been the nature of such representations; what plans he has to amend the regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *69*]: I assume the hon. Member has in mind lodging allowances that an employee might receive from his employer. These are not treated as taxable income where they are paid to cover the additional accommodation costs incurred by an employee as a result of his being required temporarily to work away from his normal place of work. Representations are received from time to time suggesting that the schedule E rules should be changed so that lodging allowances paid to an employee in other circumstances should not be taxed either. There are no plans to change the present rules.

European Court Budget

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *197*, if the Government have yet applied to the European Court for suspension of implementation by the Commission of the disputed elements in the budget pending substantive judgment by the Court; what estimate he has made of the duration of the legal proceedings at the European Court in making financial provisions for additional payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *68*]: Pending substantive judgment by the European Court, the Government hope to submit within the next 10 days their application to the Court for an interim order suspending implementation by the Commission of the disputed element in the budget. The Special

Supplementary Estimate approved by the House on 3 February contains provision for three months of additional payments, during which time it is hoped the Court will decide whether to grant our application for an interim order. The Court is not expected to reach judgment on the substantive cases before the end of 1986.

NORTHERN IRELAND

School Building

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to relieve overcrowding in Northern Ireland schools after 1 April when the moratorium on school building schemes begins.

Dr. Mawhinney: The usual steps to relieve overcrowding in schools in Northern Ireland, for example the provision of temporary classrooms, will continue to be taken, where appropriate under minor works schemes. The moratorium on new starts in the financial year 1986-87 applies only to major schemes.

Russian Language Teaching

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in how many schools in Northern Ireland Russian is taught.

Dr. Mawhinney: Two.

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Her Majesty's Government will request the Government of the Irish Republic to report to the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference on progress made towards the implementation by the Irish Government of their intention to accede to the European convention on the suppression of terrorism as stated in paragraph 7 of the joint communiqué of the Anglo-Irish summit meeting at Hillsborough.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *597-98*]: The Irish Government have already expressed their intention to accede as soon as possible to the European convention on the suppression of terrorism and are well aware of our views, and of the importance of this matter.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is intended that Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers from time to time should attend the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference; and whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been represented at official level.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *598*]: It is open under article 3 of the Anglo-Irish agreement for Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers to attend the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. None have attended so far. The FCO has been represented at official level.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will raise at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, under article 7 of the Anglo-Irish agreement, direct cross-border contacts between the British and Irish armed forces.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *598*]: Since the Army operates in support of the police, it is the Royal Ulster Constabulary which must take the lead in improving the co-ordination of security activity on either side of the border.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the security forces convicted of offences in Northern Ireland and sentenced to custodial sentences have been allowed to return to Great Britain on parole for humanitarian reasons in 1985.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *75*]: There is no parole scheme in Northern Ireland. There are provisions for home leave for certain sentenced inmates, but information about the granting of home leave to former members of the security forces is not readily available.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of prisoners refused bail for each year since 1980; and what is the average period of remand without bail for accused persons charged either wholly or in part on the basis of accomplice evidence in each of the following categories *(a)* the top decile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period, *(b)* the top quartile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period, *(c)* the second quartile of prisoners awaiting trial for the longest period and *(d)* the average period of remand for all prisoners charged on the basis of such evidence.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *76-77*]: The total number of applications for bail which were refused in each year since 1980 was as follows:

	Number
1980	728
1981	951
1982	990
1983	855
1984	849
1985	764

Information on remand times for those at present on remand in custody who have been charged on the basis of evidence from alleged accomplice is not separately available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the average period of remand without bail in each of the following cases involving accomplice witnesses' evidence of *(a)* persons convicted, *(b)* persons acquitted and *(c)* persons who were released as a result of such evidence being retracted; and how these figures compare with those for persons charged with terrorist-type offences on the basis of evidence other than accomplice evidence;

(2) what was the proportion and number of persons accused of terrorist-type offences on the basis, either wholly or in part, of accomplice witnesses' testimony who were accorded bail; and what was the equivalent proportion of persons accused of terrorist crimes who were not charged on the basis of accomplice testimony who were accorded bail in 1985.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. 76-77]: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons accused of terrorist-type offences on the basis of accomplice witness testimony are currently awaiting trial in Northern Ireland; how many persons have been convicted and how many persons have been acquitted of such crimes after having been charged either wholly or partially on the basis of accomplice witness testimony; and how many persons have been released following the retraction of testimony by accomplice witnesses;

(2) how many people have been convicted in the current year, either on their own admission of guilt or following a plea of not guilty, on the basis of evidence given by accomplices on behalf of the Crown in cases concerning scheduled offences in Northern Ireland; how many suspects arrested on the basis of such evidence have been released as a result of the retraction of evidence given by accomplices; and how many people are presently awaiting trial as a result of evidence obtained from terrorist accomplices.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. 77]: Sixty persons were convicted and 54 persons acquitted in cases concerning scheduled offences during 1985 following trials in which the evidence of a former accomplice was given on behalf of the Crown or on the basis of their statements of admission made during enquiries arising from the evidence of a former accomplice. There have been no such trials so far in 1986. It is not possible to associate directly the number of persons released with the withdrawal of evidence by alleged accomplices because persons may be released for other reasons and because persons who have been charged on such evidence may also face criminal charges on other grounds. However, the available records show that in 1985, following the withdrawal of evidence by alleged accomplices, some or all of the charges against 59 persons were dropped.

On 24 January 1986, 30 persons were on remand or had been returned for trial for scheduled offences in cases in which it was intended that an alleged accomplice would give evidence for the Crown. For figures for earlier years I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 February 1985.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Income Support

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much extra expenditure his Department would incur using the illustrative figures published in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691, if the income support personal allowance for single people aged 18 to 24 years were £30·60 per week.

Mr. Newton: Any such estimate is subject to a wide range of uncertainty, since the hon. Member's proposal would increase the numbers who might become entitled to benefit and would be likely to have other effects arising, for example, from the fact that the proposed rate would be substantially above the current YTS allowance and would imply for this age group a married couple's rate less than twice the single rate. The minimum extra cost—that is, simply applying the hon. Member's proposed benefit rate to the number in this age group who currently receive benefit—would be of the order of £30 million to £40 million.

Food and Chemical Allergies

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much expenditure is undertaken by his Department each year on research into the causes and treatment of food and chemical allergies.

Mr. Whitney: The Department does not fund research into the causes and treatment of food and chemical allergies. I understand that the Medical Research Council which is funded by grant-in-aid from the Science Vote of the Department of Education and Science, is carrying out some research in this area.

I am also advised that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has commissioned a study to obtain better information on the frequency with which allergic reactions to foods and food additives occur. The cost of this study is estimated to be £300,000 over a 3-year period.

Slough

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list National Health Service capital projects in the Slough constituency *(a)* authorised and *(b)* completed in the periods 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to 1985 and the cost of each project.

Mr. Whitney: I am afraid that information is not available centrally in precisely the form requested. Details of capital schemes funded by Oxford regional health authority and carried out over these periods and of the capital programme approved by the regional health authority for 1986-87 to 1993-94 are shown in the table. They include Wexham park hospital which provides the main hospital services for the people of Slough.

1974-75 to 1978-79	*£000*	*Wexham Park Schemes £000*	
Langley Health Centre Development	208		
Wexham Park Vickers M300 Analyser		138	
Wexham Park Accommodation for Doctors		10	
Wexham Park Repairs to Roofs		90	
Wexham Park Pharmacy Extension		3	
Total	208	241	449

1974-75 to 1978-79	£000	Wexham Park Schemes £000	
1979-80 to 1985-86			
Upton Hospital Beds for Elderly Mentally Infirm Patients	139		
Wexham Park Existing Lake		13	
Wexham Park Maternity Unit		6,745	
Wexham Park New Pathology		1,209	
Wexham Park Telephones		383	
Wexham Park Engineering Services		826	
Wexham Park Incinerator		156	
Wexham Park Nurse Education Centre		1,100	
Wexham Park 70 Beds for Mentally Ill/Elderly Mentally Infirm Patients		2,527	
Wexham Park Paediatric and Stores		2,748	
Wexham Park New Roads and Car Parks		210	
Wexham Park Peripheral Kitchen		287	
Wexham Park Main Kitchen Modernisation		1,003	
Wexham Park Temporary Pharmacy		57	
Total	139	17,264	17,403
1986-87 to 1993-94			
Wexham Park Residences		1,685	
Wexham Park Telephone Exchange		20	
Wexham Park Modernisation of X Ray, Pharmacy, Pathology at Electronic Maintenance Departments		3,257	
Wexham Park Rehabilitation		1,826	
Wexham Park 32 Geriatric Beds		175	
Slough 25 place Mental Handicap Community Unit	503		
Upton 25 Geriatric Beds	1,006		
Slough 13 place Mental Handicap Community Unit	252		
Total	1,761	6,963	8,724

Health Education

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the last 10 years for which figures are available, the amounts of money paid by his Department, whether directly, or indirectly through some other agency, to organisations and bodies working in the field of health education, detailing the organisations and bodies concerned, the amounts they received and the method of payment.

Mr. Whitney: The figures are:

	Health Education Council £ million	*Action on Smoking and Health £'000*	*Coronary Prevention Group £'000*	*Alcohol Concern £'000*
1975-76	1·6	18·5		
1976-77	1·4	31		
1977-78	2·9	41·5		
1978-79	3·5	59·5		
1979-80	4·3	70		
1980-81	4·7	80		
1981-82	6·1	90	3	
1982-83	7·9	115	3	
1983-84	8·6	136	3·25	69
1984-85	8·9	150·5	8·5	311

Payments are made by payable order.

A number of voluntary organisations grant-aided by the Department undertake some health education as part of their main function. A full list was set out in my predecessor's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 25 July 1985 at columns *765-771*.

Ambulance Drivers (Training)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make it his policy that the National Health Service training authority require all ambulance drivers to be trained and tested in motorway driving.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that the course of ambulance driver training to which I referred in my reply to my hon. Friend on 10 December 1985 at column *614*, and the test related to it, which is required for all staff driving emergency ambulances, includes motorway driving. Those driving "sitting case vehicles" on non emergency work are given driver training as considered necessary to meet local conditions. We see no reason to change this arrangement.

Guardian's Allowance

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice his Department gives to people

seeking to claim guardian's allowance as to the practical steps which should be taken to satisfy the requirement of section 38(2)(*b*) of the Social Security Act 1975.

Mr. Major: The conditions for entitlement to guardian's allowance are set out in leaflet NI 14 which is available from local social security offices. It is for the independent adjudicating authorities to decide if a person claiming the allowance has taken all reasonable steps to trace a missing parent. The steps which must be taken to trace a missing parent depend entirely on the circumstances of the case and no guidance has been issued.

Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will consider extending the period of claim under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 from six years to 12 years.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans to do so.

Health Authorities (Rates)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the rates burden on English health authorities in the years 1983-84 and 1984-85; and what is the figure in the current year.

Mr. Hayhoe: The summarised accounts of regional and district health authorities in England together with those for the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals show expenditure on rates as follows:

	£ million
1983-84	127·2
1984-85	137·0

Figures for the current financial year will be available in the Autumn.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish figures to show the revenue expenditure for 1983-84 and 1984-85 and the allocation for 1985-86, on teaching for each of the English regions and for the Board of Governors hospitals, showing the service increment for teaching with supplements expressed in cash terms and in cost per student.

Mr. Hayhoe: Most direct medical teaching costs, including the costs of pre-clinical years, are met by medical and dental schools themselves, financed by the University Grants committee. The additional service costs associated with teaching are however recognised in protected sums within regional health authority allocations: the service increment for teaching. The information requested on the sums allocated through SIFT is given in table 1.

Different funding arrangements apply to the special health authorities for the London postgraduate hospitals (formerly boards of governors hospitals) which do not receive SIFT. Instead, their general allocations take account of their special teaching role. Details of their revenue allocations for the years concerned are in table 2.

Table 1
Service increment for teaching—protected allocation 1983-84 to 1985-86

£000 of cash

Regional Health Authority	*1983-84*					*1984-85*					*1985-86*				
	Medical basic allowance*	*Dental† basic allowance*	*Total basic allowance*	*London‡ weighting and market forces*	*Total*	*Medical* basic allowance*	*Dental† basic allowance*	*Total basic allowance*	*London‡ weighting and market forces*	*Total*	*Medical* basic allowance*	*Dental† basic allowance*	*Total basic allowance*	*London‡ weighting and market forces*	*Total*
Northern	10,108	1,891	11,999	—	11,999	10,472	1,959	12,431	—	12,431	11,058	2,010	13,068	—	13,068
Yorkshire	10,333	1,496	11,829	—	11,829	10,775	1,408	12,182	—	12,182	11,083	1,372	12,455	—	12,455
Trent	27,787	1,301	29,088	—	29,088	29,090	1,348	30,438	—	30,438	29,923	1,309	31,232	—	31,232
East Anglian	4,874	—	4,874	—	4,874	5,166	—	5,166	—	5,166	5,738	—	5,738	—	5,738
North West Thames	27,001	—	27,001	2,430	29,431	19,595	—	19,596	1,764	21,359	19,653	—	19,653	1,769	21,422
North East Thames	33,784	2,581	36,365	3,273	39,638	41,471	2,674	44,145	3,973	48,118	41,572	2,704	44,276	3,985	48,261
South East Thames	22,306	4,307	26,613	2,395	29,008	23,807	3,687	27,494	2,474	29,968	24,776	3,831	28,607	2,575	31,182
South West Thames	9,390	—	9,390	845	10,235	10,403	—	10,403	936	11,339	11,895	—	11,895	1,071	12,966
Wessex	8,446	—	8,446	—	8,446	8,797	—	8,797	—	8,797	9,186	—	9,186	—	9,186
Oxford	6,739	—	6,739	—	6,739	6,982	—	6,982	—	6,982	7,388	—	7,388	—	7,388
South Western	8,626	1,115	9,741	—	9,741	9,146	1,117	10,263	—	10,263	9,088	1,072	10,160	—	10,160
West Midlands	10,782	1,934	12,716	—	12,716	11,171	2,004	13,175	—	13,175	11,821	2,105	13,926	—	13,926
Mersey	11,568	1,524	13,092	—	13,092	12,148	1,602	13,750	—	13,750	12,856	1,616	14,472	—	14,472
North Western	18,532	1,553	20,085	—	20,085	19,199	1,609	20,808	—	20,808	20,318	1,947	22,265	—	22,265
Sub-total	210,276	17,702	227,978	8,943	236,921	218,222	17,408	235,630	9,147	244,777	226,355	17,966	244,321	9,400	253,721
Protection in lieu of SIFT Northwick Park (North West Thames)	—	—	—	—	4,294	—	—	—	—	5,775	—	—	—	—	6,112
Total protected	210,276	17,702	227,978	8,943	241,215	218,222	17,408	235,630	9,147	250,552	226,355	17,966	244,321	9,400	259,833

* Allowance per medical student: 1983-84—£22,463, 1984-85—23,272, 1985-86—£24,628.
† Allowance per dental student: 1983-84—£7,190, 1984-85—£7,449, 1985-86—£7,883.
‡ London weighting and market forces 9 per cent.

TABLE 2
London Postgraduate Special Health Authorities—Revenue Allocations 1983-84—1985-86

£'000

SHAs	*1983/84*	*1984/85*	*1985/86*
Sick Children	25,799	26,687	28,248
Nervous Diseases	15,002	15,522	16,422
Moorfields	11,071	11,447	12,078
Bethlem	15,518	15,962	16,935
Heart and Chest	23,894	25,056	26,541
Marsden	17,190	17,796	18,784
Hammersmith and Queen Charlottes	38,829	40,432	42,593
Eastman	4,120	4,385	4,725
Total	151,423	157,287	166,326

Unit General Managers

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many of the total number of unit general managers so far appointed were previously *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors, *(c)* National Health Service administrators, *(d)* other National Health Service employees and *(e)* working outside the National Health Service;

(2) how many of the unit general managers so far appointed are male and how many female.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that not all this information is collected centrally. However I understand that health authorities have so far made the following appointments:

	Number
Nurses	42
Doctors	82
NHS Administrators	254
Other NHS	10
Non-NHS	35
Total	423

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give for each region the number of unit general managers who have so far been appointed.

Mr. Hayhoe: I understand the following appointments have so far been made:

	Number
Northern	39
Yorkshire	16
Trent	57
East Anglian	19
North west Thames	43
North east Thames	28
South east Thames	12
South west Thames	32
Wessex	31
Oxford	32
South Western	22
West Midlands	41
Mersey	25
North Western	26

Mrs. Myra Mabel Fairclough

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is now in a position to make a report available into the circumstances of the death of Myra Mabel Fairclough at St. Mary's hospital, Portsmouth.

Mr. Whitney: In view of the possibility of legal proceedings I am afraid that it would be improper at this stage to publicise the report.

Mr. Kenneth Harris

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether Mr. Kenneth Harris was transferred to Harefield hospital as a private patient following his heart transplant operation at the Harley street clinic.

Mr. Whitney: No. I understand that following a heart operation on a patient at the Harley street clinic, the view of the clinicians involved was that his condition indicated the need for an immediate heart transplant. In view of his condition it was decided that he should not be moved, and he therefore underwent a heart transplant on 10 January 1986 at the Harley street clinic. The costs of the operation and of his care in the clinic were met by American Medical International. The operation was perfomed by Mr. Magdi Jacoub from Harefield and a team from the clinic. The patient was transferred to Harefield on 15 January to continue his post-operative treatment in the specialist unit there as a National Health Service patient.

Mr. D. H. Briggs

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why the mobility allowance granted to Mr. D. H. Briggs of Kenilworth road, Balsall common, Coventry, reference MOB 895913, on 27 November 1985 has still not been paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I regret that a number of errors have been made in dealing with Mr. Briggs' claim. I am investigating these, and I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Hospitals (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients there are in Coldeast hospital, Hampshire; how many patients have not been able to be put into the community; and where they are to be placed.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member all the information he seeks. Some of it is not available centrally. The most recent available figures are given in the table. For futher information I suggest that the hon. Member consults the health authority concerned.

Resident patients in Coldeast hospitals at 31 December 1984

Hospital	*Number*
Coldeast	381
Sandy Point	24
Locksway House	22

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what has been the number of beds in St. James' hospital, Portsmouth, in each year since 1979;

(2) what has been the number of beds in Queen Alexandra hospital, Portsmouth, in each year since 1979;

(3) what has been the number of beds in St. Mary's hospital, Portsmouth, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested is given in the table.

Average daily number of available beds

Hospital	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
St. James' hospital, Portsmouth	561	545	550	554	536	464
St. Mary's hospital, Portsmouth	776	773	778	783	766	748
Queen Alexandra hospital, Portsmouth	570	665	661	661	678	683

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of staff employed at each hospital in the Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health district for each year since 1979 and by category of employment.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that this information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may like to obtain it from the chairman of the district health authority.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of psycho-geriatric beds in each hospital in the Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health district currently and each year since 1979.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested is given in the table. Only one hospital in the district had beds available in the psychogeriatric specialty during this period.

*Reported average daily number of available beds in the psychogeriatric specialty in hospitals in Portsmouth and South East Hampshire District Health Authority**
St. James' Hospital

	Number
1979	Nil
1980	Nil
1981	Nil
1982	157
1983	161
1984	163

* Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health District prior to 1 April 1982.

Children in Care (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many children there are in care in each district in Hampshire; and how these figures compare with equivalent figures for 1981 and 1979, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: The figures requested for each district in Hampshire are not available centrally. The numbers of children in care in the county of Hampshire at 31 March 1979, 1981 and 1984 are given in the table.

Number of children in care in Hampshire at 31 March in 1979, 1981 and 1984

At 31 March	*Children in Care*
1979	2,999
1981	2,961
1984	2,446

Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his reply on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *746*, he will publish a similar table showing the total weekly pensions assuming no change in the state earnings-related pension scheme, annual increases in the basic pension in line with average earnings, and that earnings increase in real terms by 1·5 per cent. a year.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Health and Personal Social Services (Statistics)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is now able to give figures for 1984 to update table 3·14 of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England 1982".

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 November 1985 c. *657*]: The updated table is as follows. These figures have not been previously published in this format. Figures for the years up to and including 1983 were given in table 3.14 of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England, 1985 edition", which was published on 3 December 1985.

Copies are available in the Library.

III Manpower
Nursing and midwifery staff: Analysis by occupation and grade
30 September
Table 3.14 *England*

		Whole-time equivalents†† 1984
All Nursing and Midwifery Staff*	Total	392,120
Administrative nursing staff at Regional, Area and District HQs and centrally-based services		4,296
Administrative midwifery staff at Regional, Area and District HQs		179
Blood transfusion service staff		1,140
Hospital nursing staff:	Total	328,268
Qualified:	Total	174,631
Senior Nurses and above†		5,878
Tutorial nursing staff		4,701
Other registered nurses		97,588
Enrolled nurses		66,463
Learners:	Total	69,492
Post-registration student nurses		1,959
Post-enrolment student nurses		1,475
Pre-registration student nurses		50,963
Pupil nurses		15,094
Unqualified:	Total	84,148
Other nursing staff‡		84,116
Nursing cadets		30
Hospital midwifery staff:	Total	18,535
Qualified:	Total	13,795
Senior Nurses and above†		627
Tutorial midwifery staff		540
Other state certified midwives		12,627
Learners: Student midwives		4,740
Primary health care nursing staff:	Total	35,845
Senior Nurses†		1,498
District nursing tutorial staff		39

	Whole-time equivalents†† 1984
Health Visitors‖	9,232
TB visitors with HV certificate	19
TB visitors without HV certificate	45
District nursing (registered nurses)¶	10,548
District nursing (enrolled nurses)¶	4,047
School nursing (registered nurses)●	2,442
School nursing (enrolled nurses)	219
Dual/triple duty posts:	
Health visitor/district nurse/midwife (and Health Visitor/Midwife)	49
District nurse/midwife (and SRN/Midwife)	579
Enrolled nurse/midwife	6
Other registered nurses■	2,175
Other enrolled nurses★	389
Nursing auxiliaries and other unqualified staff	4,559
Community health midwifery staff:	
District midwife	3,859
Agency nurses (Hospital)#	3,426
Agency midwives (Hospital)#	220
Agency nurses (PHC)#	101
Agency midwives (PHC)#	—
Health visitor students#	971
District nurse students #**	648

* Excludes HV students, District Nurse students and agency staff.
† Incorporates the grades of Senior Nursing Officers and Nursing Officer existing prior to the 1982 reorganisation of nurse grading structure.
‡ Includes nursing auxiliaries and nursery nurses.
‖ Includes Health Visitor Fieldwork Teachers, HV School Nurses and HV Bank Nurses.
¶ Includes District Nurse Practical Work Teachers, Bank District Nurses and SRNs and SENs assisting District Nurses.
● Includes school nurses and SRNs assisting school health services.
■ Includes SRNs assisting health visiting and other SRNs in community nursing.
★ Includes SENs assisting health visiting and other SENs in community nursing.
Not included in the totals.
** Grade introduced in 1981.
†† All figures have been independently rounded.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update table 3.1 of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England 1982" by giving figures for 1981 to 1983 and such figures as are available for 30 March 1985.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 November 1985, c. *657*]: The table shows the figures for September 1984, together with those figures which are available (at summary level only) for March 1985. These figures have not been previously published in this format. Corresponding figures for the years 1981 to 1983 were given in Table 3.1 of "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England, 1985 edition" which was published on 3 December 1985.

Copies are available in the Library.

III Manpower
Health and personal social services manpower summary
30 September
Table 3.1 *England*

	Unit‡‡	*September 1984*	*March 1985*
All Health Service staff and practitioners: Total		865,435	n.a.
All directly-employed staff: Total	Wte	817,202	816,100
Medical and dental staff*: Total	Wte	40,221	41,000
Medical staff		37,710	—
Dental staff		2,510	—
Hospital medical and dental staff: Total	Wte	35,870	36,600
Medical staff		33,416	—
Medical locum staff		1,371	—
Dental staff		1,061	—
Dental locum staff		22	—
Community health service medical and dental staff: Total	Wte	4,350	4,400
Medical staff		2,879	—
Medical locum staff		44	—
Dental staff		1,417	—
Dental locum staff		10	—
Nursing and midwifery staff: Total	Wte	397,488	401,200
Nursing staff: Total	Wte	374,695	—
Administrative†		2,627	—
Centrally based services		1,669	—
Blood transfusion service		1,140	—
Hospital staff		328,268	—
Primary health care services‡		36,493	—
Health visitor students		971	—
Agency nurses		3,527	—
Midwifery staff: Total	Wte	22,794	—
Administrative staff†		179	—
Hospital staff		18,535	—
Community health services		3,858	—
Agency midwives		222	—
Professional and technical (excluding works) staff††	Wte	72,656	72,700
Works professional staff: Total	Wte	6,011	6,100
Health Authorities staff		6,010	—

	Unit‡‡	September 1984	March 1985
Dental Estimates Board staff		1	—
Maintenance (building and engineering) staff: Total	Wte	20,216	20,000
Health Authorities staff		20,190	—
Dental Estimates Board staff		12	—
Prescription Pricing Authority staff		14	—
Administrative and clerical staff‖: Total	Wte	110,304	110,400
Health Authorities staff		106,817	—
Dental Estimates Board staff		1,501	—
Prescription Pricing Authority staff		1,987	—
Ambulance officers and control assistants	Wte	3,174	18,200
Ambulancemen/women	Wte	14,929	—
Ancillary staff: Total††	Wte	152,202	146,500
Health Authorities staff		152,126	—
Dental Estimates Board staff		32	—
Prescription Pricing Authority staff		43	—
Family Practitioner Committee services:			
Practitioners: Total	No.	48,233	n.a.
General medical practitioners: Total ¶	No.	25,788	n.a.
Unrestricted principals		23,640	n.a.
Restricted principals		179	n.a.
Assistants		266	n.a.
Trainees		1,703	n.a.
General dental practitioners: Total	No.	14,066	n.a.
Principals		13,984	n.a.
Assistants		82	n.a.
Ophthalmic medical practitioners●	No.	833	n.a.
Ophthalmic opticians●	No.	4,998	n.a.
Dispensing opticians●	No.	2,553	n.a.
Local Authority Social Services staff:■			
Senior social service staff*	Wte	4,502	n.a.
Senior social workers#		4,571	n.a.
Social workers¤		19,721	n.a.
Home helpsμ		53,145	n.a.
Day nursery staffΩ		6,875	n.a.
Staff of adult training centres ⁂		4,837	n.a.
Staff of homes for the mentally disordered**		8,891	n.a.
Staff of residential homes for the elderly and physically handicapped**		55,704	n.a.

Headquarters, Blood Transfusion Centre and Mass Radiography Unit staff are included in the groups of staff to which they relate—eg "Medical".

The definition used in setting manpower targets for the directly employed staff of Regional Health Authorities (and Special Health Authorities) excludes agency Nursing and Midwifery staff and locum Medical and Dental Staff.

• Excludes hospital practitioners, part-time medical/dental officers (clinical assistants), general medical practitioners participating in Hospital Staff Funds and occasional sessional staff in community health services.

† Area and district nursing and midwifery staff were included with hospital staff in 1974. Separate figures for administrative and centrally based nursing staff are not available for this year.

‡ Includes District Nurse Students (grade introduced in 1981).

‖ Figures exclude ambulance officers.

¶ Figures relate to 1 October.

● Figures relate to 31 December.

■ Staff of residential establishments for children and day centres have been excluded.

* Senior directing, managing, professional and advisory staff only. Figures for 1974 include some senior social workers.

Includes team leaders.

¤ Figures include community workers, trainee social workers and welfare assistants.

μ Includes home help organisers and assistant organisers.

Ω Excludes clerical/secretarial, works, maintenance, and domestic etc. staff.

⁂ Managers and instructors only.

** All staff including general clerical/secretarial, works, maintenance, domestic etc.

†† Not directly comparable with published figures for earlier years, due to the transfer of Operating Department Assistants on 1April 1984 from the Ancillary to the P & T 'B' staffs council.

‡‡ All figures have been independently rounded.

n.a. = Not available.

Primary Health Care (Expenditure)

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the expenditure on primary health care per head of population for each year since 1979 in *(a)* the Islington health authority area, *(b)* Barnet and *(c)* Sutton Coldfield.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 December 1985, c. *155*]: Following are the figures requested:

*Expenditure per Head of Population on Primary Health Care**

	Health Authority		
	Islington	*Barnet*	*North Birmingham*
	£	£	£
1979-80	54	44	44
1980-81	69	57	55
1981-82	81	65	63
1982-83	82	70	71
1983-84	86	74	76
1984-85	96	86	85

* Current expenditure on community health services plus net expenditure on family practitioner services. The latter expenditure cannot strictly be attributed to particular districts but has been included (pro-rata to population) from the annual accounts of the family practitioner committees which account for it.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 February 1986

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Medical Negligence

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Attorney-General how many cases of medical negligence are considered by courts on average per annum; and how many cases are currently extant.

The Attorney-General: I regret that information relating to cases of medical negligence is not currently collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Maintenance

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* all local authority bids made to his Department for the purposes of school maintenance over the last 12 months.

Mr. Dunn: The greater part of local education authorities' maintenance expenditure is classified as recurrent. Authorities do not submit bids in respect of recurrent expenditure, but provision for expenditure on maintenance and repairs, along with all other aspects of recurrent education spending, is discussed annually with the local authority associations.

Each authority is invited annually to submit to the Department details of its capital expenditure plans; capitalised maintenance expenditure may figure in these, but is not separately identifiable on the basis of the information supplied.

Teachers (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time teachers in Hampshire; and what the figures were in 1979.

Mr. Chris Patten: There were 10,312 full-time and 1,734 part-time qualified teachers employed within primary, middle and secondary schools in Hampshire in January 1985. The equivalent figures for Januray 1979 were 12,273 full-time and 1,547 part-time qualified teachers respectively.

Schoolchildren (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total number of schoolchildren in Hampshire at the last available date and in 1979, respectively.

Mr. Dunn: There were 218,990 full-time and 2,159 part-time pupils in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in Hampshire in January 1985. The equivalent figures for January 1979 were 260,074 full-time and 1,688 part-time pupils respectively.

Mid-day Supervision

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list those local education authorities which have so far applied for education support grant in respect of their proposals for mid-day supervision in schools.

Sir Keith Joseph: By 5 February applications had been received from the following local education authorities:

Gloucestershire
Berkshire
Redbridge
Bradford
Hereford and Worcester
Hillingdon
Bury
Harrow
Newham
Durham
South Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Surrey
Buckinghamshire
Shropshire
Nottinghamshire
Ealing
Gateshead
Oxfordshire
Bedfordshire
Bolton
Bromley
Essex
Sunderland
Hampshire

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committees

Mr. McCrindle asked the Lord Privy Seal what action he intends to take with regard to the implementation of the proposals made in the second report from the Committee of Privileges, Session 1984-85, regarding the premature disclosure of proceedings of Select Committees.

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the procedures recommended in paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 of the report are already being followed by Select Committees. As regards the recommendation [paragraph 14(iv)] that a report by a Select Committee that a leak had caused "substantial interference" to its work should be automatically referred to the Committee of Privileges: I propose that any change in Standing Orders should be deferred until the effect of the implementation of the other recommendations made in the report can be assessed.

Private Members' Motions

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of private members' motions, excluding prayers against statutory instruments, which have been debated in parliamentary time provided by the Government in each Session since 1960.

Mr. Biffen: The information requested is as follows:

Session 1960-61
16th February 1961 — Ruling by Mr. Speaker — Dissent

(Motion by Mr. Sydney Silverman)

1961-62
27th March 1962—Rulings of the Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Sydney Silverman)

1962-63
12th July 1963—Estimates Committee Reports (Sir Eric Errington) (Sir Spencer Summers)

1963-64

1964-65
4th March 1965—South and West Dorset Water Order 1964 (Motion for annulment—Rear-Admiral Morgan Giles)
25th March 1965—Privilege (Mr. Sydney Silverman)

1965-66

1966-67
28th November 1966—Committee of Public Accounts Reports (Mr. Boyd-Carpenter)
9th February 1967—Estimates Committee Reports (Sir Henry d'Avigdor-Goldsmid)
4th May 1967—Estimates Committee Reports (Mr. William Hamling)

1967-68
13th February 1968—Humber Harbour Reorganisation Scheme 1966 Confirmation Order 1967 (Motion, That Petitions of General Objection against the Order be not referred to a Joint Committee—Commander Harry Pursey)
28th March 1968—Clean Air Bill (Motion, That Standing Committee C be discharged from considering the Bill and that Bill be committed to a Committee of the Whole House. Debate adjourned; resumed 10th April)
16th May 1968—Procedure Committee (Mr. Boyd-Carpenter)

1968-69
14th November 1968—Estimates Committee Reports (Mrs. Renée Short)
12th June 1969—Government's Action Regarding Divorce Reform Bill (Sir Lionel Heald)

1969-70

1970-71

1971-72
19th October 1972—Broadcasting of the Proceedings of the House (Mr. Brian Batsford)

1972-73
22nd January 1973—Select Committee on Science and Technology Reports (Mr. Airey Neave)

1973-74

1974-75
11th December 1974—Capital Punishment (Mr. Brian Walden)

1975-76
6th May 1976—Standing Order No. 22 (Irrelevance or repetition) (Mr. J. Enoch Powell)
14th June 1976—Blaenau Gwent District (Rassau North Industrial Estate) Compulsory Purchase Order 1974—(Motion that Petitions of General Objection against the Order be not referred to a Joint Committee—Mr. Jeffrey Thomas)

1976-77
27th January 1976—Children and Young Persons (Motion to take note of a statutory instrument) (Mr. Roger Sims)

1977-78
6th March 1976—Firearms (Northern Ireland) (Motion to take note of a statutory instrument—Mr. John Farr)

1978-79

1979-80
19th July 1979—The Death Penalty (Mr. Eldon Griffiths)

1980-81

1981-82

1982-83

1983-84
20th March 1984—Committee of Public Accounts Reports (Mr. Robert Sheldon)
27th July 1984—Select Committees (Motions for changes in membership, Mr. Marcus Fox on behalf of the Committees of Selection)

1984-85
20th November 1985—Televising of Proceedings of the House (Miss Janet Fookes)

Early-day Motions

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Lord Privy Seal (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of early-day motions which have been debated on the Floor of the House in parliamentary time provided by the Government in each Session since 1960, showing separately *(a)* prayers against statutory instruments and *(b)* other motions;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of early-day motions that have been debated on the Floor of the House in each Session since 1960, showing respectively *(a)* prayers against statutory instruments and *(b)* other motions.

Mr. Biffen: The information is not readily available. My hon. Friend may wish to discuss with the offices concerned the provision of information which would nevertheless meet his needs.

ENERGY

Nationalisation

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state, for each industry in public ownership in 1979, the latest annual amount paid to former owners; and, in respect of any such industry which has been privatised, if there is any contribution from public funds for compensation payments to former owners.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: All but an insignificant amount of compensation for the publicly owned energy industries has been paid; the remaining small payments are a matter for the industries concerned.

No contributions have been made from public funds for compensation payments for those parts of the industries which have been privatised since 1979.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given;

(2) if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available;

(3) if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Department made the following grants under its energy efficiency programme in 1984-85 (the last year for which figures are available):

	£
Neighbourhood Energy Action	80,905
Feasibility and training grants	
Dundee Inner City Neighbourhood Energy Action	777·05
Bexhill Council for Voluntary Service	682·35
Bridgeton—Burrowfield Heating Action	833·00
Clydebank Household Insulation Programme	681·30
Aberdeen Friends of the Earth	500·00
NAG Energy Project Caernarfon	1,026·19
Cornwall Rural Community Council	2,999·65
The Boys Brigade	500·00
Greater Easterhouse Residents Committee	1,666·00
Leeds Friends of the Earth	98·55
Cambridge Friends of the Earth	104·30
Urban Centre for Appropriate Technology (Bristol)	555·80
Midlothian Council for Social Services	493·20
Carnwadric Tenants Association	833·00
Canterbury and District Enterprise Trust	1,050·00
Scottish Neighbourhood Energy Action	4,586·00
Portsmouth Housing Association	141·60
Organisation for Mutual Enterprise and Group Aid	425·00
Wyre Forest Friends of the Earth	585·00
South Nitshill Community Association	333·00
Newport Neuern Energy Group	2,400·00
National Association for the Care and Resettlemem of Offenders	4,024·32
Hull Energy Action Team	4,765·00
Dartington Institute	3,487·90
London Energy and Employment Network	16,987·25
Tynedale Energy Group	131·35
Sandwell Council for Voluntary Service	792·45
Churches Community Programme	2,362·75
Burnage Christian Council	52·00
Shelter (Scotland)	1,760·20
Energy Concern Community Programme Agency	620·00
Beth Johnson Foundation	492·80
Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service	800·00
Blairgowrie Youth Project	800·00
Nottingham Friends of the Earth	3,200·00
Jubilee Community Association (Birkenhead)	742·00
Merseyside Energy Advice Unit	193·80
Northamptonshire Social Services	78·00
Abbeyview Community Council	790·29
Heatwise Glasgow	800·00
Medway Towns "Young Employment Project"	800·00
Board for Social Responsibility (Suffolk)	1,000·00
Oldham Unemployed Workers Centre	107·20
Leominster District Community Association	891·75
Islay Council for Social Service	800·00
Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Service	886·55
Energy Support Unit (Sunderland)	56·75
Project Grants	
NACRO (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)	53,350·94
Coventry Home Insulation Project	2,770·00
North Manlake Community Programme	4,928·88
Wolverhampton Friends of the Earth	2,111·00
Community Activities and Training in Ogwr	4,654·60
Age Concern	15,000·00
Birmingham Friends of the Earth	810·00
Urban Centre for Appropriate Technology	11,958·13
Brent Energy Services Team	4,986·25
Boys Brigade, Birmingham	5,000·00
Dudley Community Programme Agency	2,370·61
Cornwall Rural Community Council	14,967·00
Portsmouth Care and Repair	4,950·00
Pen Green Community Development Project	4,849·80
Scottish Neighbourhood Energy Action	43,500·00
Bexhill Council for Voluntary Service	5,000·00
Dundee Inner City Neighbourhood Energy Action Centre	4,250·00
Burnage Christian Council	5,000·00
Oldham Unemployed Workers Centre	4,991·45
Gorgie Dalry	4,652·11
Gordon Rural Action Information Network (Aberdeen)	6,799·36
Brighton and Hove Community Programme Agency	2,134·40
Sheffield Council for Voluntary Service	2,000·00
Cambridge Training Associated	3,545·00
Energy Concern	9,310·00
Community Council of Shropshire	15,500·00
Dartington Institute	4,000·00
Churches Community Centre	15,000·00
Tweeddale Association of Voluntary Service	3,944·04
Keeping Kirklees Warm	2,114·60
Rhondda Enterprise	2,550·00
North Tyneside Council for Voluntary Service	2,000·00
Shelter (Scotland)	2,500·00
Class Time, Norwich	2,000·00

These are commitment figures. Accounting procedures preclude the separate identification of payments without disproportionate expense.

Although no grant was made in 1984-85 the Department has agreed to make a grant of £3,000 in each of the financial years 1985-86 to 1988-89 to the petroleum law education trust.

Both the petroleum law education trust and neighbourhood energy action are registered charities, and are thus precluded from engaging in political activity. The bona fides of applicants for seedcorn grants are checked with neighbourhood energy action before grants are committed.

Project grants go only to bodies engaged in projects using the Manpower Services Commission's community programme, under whose rules they are forbidden to engage in political activity. Compliance is monitored and enforced by the MSC.

In addition, in 1984-85 and 1985-86 the Department has made a grant-in-aid to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority who have made a number of minor donations to voluntary bodies, the largest of which in 1984-85 was £50 to the police memorial trust.

Alternative Energy Projects

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the estimated contribution, in million tons coal equivalent, of each alternative energy project to total energy supply; and what is each project's likely contribution in the year 2000.

Mr. Peter Walker: At present hydro power contributes about 2 mtce per annum to total United Kingdom energy supply. In addition some heat-producing renewables have now become established as economically attractive and are beginning to make a valuable contribution.

Forecasts of the contribution from the renewable technologies to United Kingdom energy supply in 2025 published in ETSU R30, copies of which are in the Libraries of both Houses, show that for the heat producing technologies, the contribution could be about 26 mtce per annum and for the electricity producing technologies, about 2 mtce.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Crown Immunity

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has yet completed his review of Crown immunity in respect of hospital kitchens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: Yes. I have completed the review of Crown immunity of hospital kitchens in respect of the food hygiene provisions of the Food Act 1984. Inevitably much of the ground covered is the subject of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to the effectiveness with which he has pursued this matter. His Bill is to be debated tomorrow and I think it right to indicate now the conclusions which the Government have drawn from the review and the action which will follow.

The Government share the widespread concern about the state of hygiene in some hospital kitchens. This problem led to tragic consequences at the Stanley Royd hospital in August 1985 which was the subject of the recent inquiry. In responding to these problems there can be no substitute for more effective management and supervision in hospital kitchens generally. The introduction of general managers, who will be both responsible and accountable for these and other matters, will do much to secure this. But the Government have concluded that there is more that can and should be done.

The Food Act 1984 and the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970 do not apply to the Crown. Nevertheless, it has for many years been Government policy that health authorities should behave as if they did. But the Government have decided that the nature of the problems displayed by recent events is such that stronger safeguards are needed to underpin management effort and above all to protect the patients. I therefore intend to introduce legislation in the present Session to remove Crown immunity from hospital catering in respect of the food hygiene regulations by making health authorities subject to the provisions of the Food Act.

This legislation will be coupled with strengthened guidance to the health service on measures to ensure high food hygiene standards. The Government are determined to spare no effort to secure the highest standards of food hygiene in hospitals.

NHS (Services)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assessments have been made by his Department of cost-effectiveness of services provided within the National Health Service since the implementation of the recommendations of the Griffiths report.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am determined to consolidate and develop the significant improvements which have already been achieved in the cost-effectiveness of the National Health Service so that the increased resources provided by the Government are used to give the best possible service to patients. This has been one of the Government's major aims both in setting up the Griffiths inquiry and in implementing its proposals for strengthening management and making it more accountable at all levels. I endorse the inquiry team's view that line managers have a key responsibility to seek out cost improvements in all the services they manage and should be held to account for their achievement. Within the Department the NHS management board, established by my right hon. Friend on the recommendation of the inquiry team, has been developing the arrangements which already existed for health authorities to achieve a significant level of measurable cost improvement each year. Cost improvements achieved in 1984-85 amounted to over £100 million —more than 1 per cent. of health authorities' revenue allocations. The cost improvement targets proposed by authorities for 1985-86 give a total of about £150 million —more than 1½ per cent. of revenue allocations.

Higher cash spending and improved efficiency resulted in very significant increases in services to patients in 1983, as the service recovered from industrial action, and 1984. For example, in-patient and day cases increased by 650,000 and out-patient attendances by nearly 1·7 million between 1982 and 1984.

My right hon. Friend introduced in 1983 a programme of "Rayner-type" scrutinies which are conducted by seconded NHS officers who examine in detail a particular field where there is potential for improving efficiency. A number of scrutiny reports have now been published and regional health authorities are specifically asked to identify savings from implementing these in their cost improvement programmes.

The Department introduced performance indicators for the NHS in 1983. These are an important source of information for local managers on variations between their own and comparable districts' performance in key areas which can help them identify scope for improvement. The original indicators have been revised and expanded and indicators based on 1984-85 data have now been issued to all authorities.

The management board will in future be undertaking annual reviews of the performance of individual regions. The first of these reviews — which supplement arrangements already existing for reviews at Ministerial level — are about to take place. They will be used to examine key aspects of authorities' performance, including the short-term programme submitted annually by each RHA and the cost improvements it proposes. They will draw on performance indicators and other key data to help in identifying aspects of performance requiring particular scrutiny. Regional health authorities are taking up similar performance issues in their reviews of districts.

The NHS management board is actively considering ways in which these monitoring and review arrangements can be further developed and strengthened, and local management supported in its task of seeking greater cost-effectiveness in all services.

Rates

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) where financial savings to be made as a result of the proposal that social security recipients should pay 20 per cent. of their rates will be shown in the national accounts;

(2) if the transitional protection provisions for supplementary benefit recipients in April 1988 will cover their extra expenditure in having to meet 20 per cent. of their rates bill;

(3) if the transitional protection in his proposed reforms of social security covers the 20 per cent. contribution to local rates.

Mr. Newton: As the White Paper made clear in paragraphs 3.54-3.57, and as my right hon. Friend stated

to the House on Second Reading of the Social Security Bill on 28 January at column 829 the proposed social security structure will have to be developed in the light of discussions on the recent Green Paper on local government finance. The transitional protection arrangements described in paragraphs 3.44 and 3.89 of the White Paper refer to weekly cash payments of supplementary benefit/income support and FIS/family credit, not to housing benefit including rate rebates. Any reduction in rate rebates appears in the national accounts as an increase in rates payable; they are not shown as a separate item.

Benefits

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what, in the light of the economic assumptions contained in the latest Government expenditure plans, is the estimated percentage increase upon which the July 1986 supplementary benefit uprating will be based;

(2) what, in the light of the economic assumptions contained in the latest Government expenditure plans, is the estimated percentage increase upon which the July 1986 housing benefit uprating will be based.

Mr. Newton: In recent years the uprating of the supplementary benefit scale rates has been based on the retail price index excluding housing costs, and that of the housing benefit needs allowances on the retail price index excluding housing costs plus the movement of local authority rent and rates and water rates. It is not the practice to publish forward estimates of movements in individual components of the retail price index.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will state, for each of the following categories of supplementary benefit recipients, the numbers receiving laundry additions, the average amount received by each person and the total amount paid *(a)* pensioners aged 60 to 79 years of age, *(b)* pensioners aged 80 years and over, *(c)* disabled pensioners, namely, those receiving benefits related to disability or continuing incapacity, aged 60 to 79 years and *(d)* all other non-pensioner recipients;

(2) if he will state, for each of the following categories of supplementary benefit recipients, the numbers receiving diet additions, the average amount received by each person and the total amount paid *(a)* pensioners aged 60 to 79 years, *(b)* pensioners aged 80 years and over, *(c)* disabled pensioners, namely, those receiving benefits related to disability or continuing incapacity, aged 60 to 79 years and *(d)* all other non-pensioner recipients;

(3) if he will state, for each of the following categories of supplementary benefit recipients, the numbers receiving heating additions, the average amount received by each person and the total amount paid *(a)* pensioners aged 60 to 79, *(b)* pensioners aged 80 years and over, *(c)* disabled pensioners, namely, those receiving benefits related to disability or continuing incapacity, aged 60 to 79 years and *(d)* all other non-pensioner recipients.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Virus B

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many persons have died in the United Kingdom during each of the last 30 years as a result of infection with Virus B.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, in England and Wales there have been no deaths registered since 1979 with an underlying cause of death stated as Simian B disease, which is an extremely rare condition in this country.

Mrs. B (Invalid Carriage)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the current whereabouts of the offside rear shock absorber of the crashed three-wheel carriage driven by Mrs. B. of Rutland, (Department Reference PO(5) 4374/61); and why it was removed by representatives of his Department prior to the second visit by Mrs. B's consultant engineer to the Ministry's retained garage in December 1983;

(2) what tests were carried out by representatives of his Department on the removed shock absorber of Mrs. B. of Rutland's invalid carriage prior to December 1983; why they were only instigated after the first report in May 1983 by Mrs. B's consultant engineer; what was the result of the tests; and what steps were taken to notify Mrs. B's legal advisers of the findings;

(3) why no response was made by his Department's Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre at Sherwood hospital to the oral and written complaints made by Mrs. B of Rutland (Reference PO(5) 4374/61) about the condition of her three-wheeled invalid carriage in February 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Conceptions (Statistics)

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many conceptions to 15-year-old girls there were in England and Wales in 1983; and how many of these conceptions ended in abortion and how many ended in births.

Mr. Whitney: During 1983 there were 6,968 known conceptions to girls usually resident in England and Wales who were estimated to have been aged 15 years at the time of conception. Of these, 3,108 led to maternities with live or still births and 3,860 were terminated by abortion under the 1967 Act.

Pensions and Benefits (Payment)

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in what areas recipients of pensions and other benefits have been offered financial inducements to change from payment through the Post Office network to payment through banks; and under what powers such offers are authorised.

Mr. Major: I understand that no such inducements have been offered.

South London Blood Transfusion Centre

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has on the grade at which the post of general manager of the South London blood transfusion centre has been advertised; to whom the manager will be responsible; and what medical qualifications are required.

Mr. Hayhoe: The post of general manager of the south London blood transfusion service was advertised by the South-West Thames regional health authority as a scale 29 post; it was made clear that a clinician appointment would be made in accordance with HC(85)9. It is intended that the general manager will report to the regional general manager of the South-West Thames regional health authority. The advertisement made no mention of any specific qualifications being required.

Health Authorities (Grading)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance he gives to regional health authorities as to the grading and qualifications appropriate for management of regional medical services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Most medical services are managed at district or unit level, even if designated a regional specialty. With the implementation of general management health authorities have been allowed to propose management arrangements to suit local circumstances. Health authorities are expected to make provision for appropriate professional input into management.

Orthopaedic Operations (Devon)

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average waiting time for orthopaedic operations at Exeter, Barnstaple and Plymouth hospitals; and what is the average waiting time for such operations nationally.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give my hon. Friend all the information he seeks. Information on waiting time for admission to individual hospitals is not available centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the chairman of the South-Western regional health authority who may be able to provide details of local activity. The estimated median interval between the date a patient was put on the waiting list and the date of admission to a National Health Service hospital in England for the specialty of trauma and orthopaedics in 1983, the latest year for which information is available centrally, was 13 weeks.

Cancer

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average national figure for cases of lymphatic cancer and leukaemia among people under 25 years of age, expressed *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a rate of incidence.

Mr. Hayhoe: The average annual numbers of registrations of newly diagnosed cases of (i) Hodgkin's and non-Hodgkin's lymphomas (lymphatic cancer), International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 9th revision 200-202 and (ii) Leukaemia, ICD (9) 204-208, for persons aged under 25 years of age for the period 1980-82 for England and Wales are 466 and 477 respectively, and these represent corresponding rates per 100,000 population of 2·60 and 2·66.

Birth Statistics

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the numbers of children born to unmarried mothers in each year since 1965 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland, expressed (i) in figures and (ii) as a percentage of all live births.

Mr. Whitney: The available statistics for Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland relate to births which were registered as illegitimate and are as follows.

Year of birth	Number of live births registered as illegitimate				Percentage of live births registered as illegitimate			
	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland	England	Wales	Northern Ireland
1965	5,883	63,583	2,666	995	5·8	7·8	5·8	2·9
1966	6,160	64,217	2,839	1,028	6·4	8·0	6·3	3·1
1967	6,663	66,927	3,001	1,205	6·9	8·5	6·9	3·6
1968	6,998	66,652	3,154	1,245	7·4	8·6	7·1	3·8
1969	6,733	64,058	2,983	1,210	7·5	8·5	6·9	3·7
1970	6,712	61,879	2,865	1,214	7·7	8·3	6·7	3·8
1971	7,029	62,610	3,068	1,207	8·1	8·5	7·1	3·8
1972	6,661	59,279	3,066	1,263	8·5	8·7	7·7	4·2
1973	6,520	55,089	2,871	1,195	8·8	8·6	7·6	4·1
1974	6,349	53,334	2,990	1,296	9·1	8·8	8·3	4·8
1975	6,314	51,907	2,838	1,338	9·3	9·1	8·4	5·1
1976	6,025	50,826	2,868	1,330	9·3	9·2	8·6	5·0
1977	5,968	52,478	2,821	1,383	9·6	9·8	8·9	5·4
1978	6,304	57,583	2,992	1,523	9·8	10·2	9·0	5·8
1979	6,960	66,056	3,344	1,668	10·2	11·0	9·2	5·9
1980	7,678	73,413	3,896	1,751	11·1	11·9	10·4	6·1
1981	8,447	76,916	4,022	1,902	12·2	12·9	11·2	7·0
1982	9,395	85,188	4,614	2,112	14·2	14·4	12·9	7·8
1983	9,581	94,022	5,145	2,383	14·7	15·8	14·5	8·7
1984	10,640	104,404	6,026	2,802	16·3	17·4	16·8	10·1

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the percentage cumulative growth of National Health Service expenditure each year since 1979 *(a)* in retail price index terms, *(b)* in terms of National Health Service pay and prices and *(c)* after taking account of the annually growing demand for health services; if he will give actual expenditure figures each year both in current and constant price terms in accordance with each of these three criteria; and if he will state the level of planned expenditure savings each year, both in current and constant price terms, together with the evidence on which these expenditure savings claims are based.

Mr. Hayhoe: I will let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Social Security Bill (Actuary's Report)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in the Government Actuary's report to the Social Security Bill 1986, Cmnd.9711, in table 5, page 14, what would be the estimated joint rates of contributions for each of the years stated if the assumptions included: *(a)* forecast growth of the economy of three per cent. per year, *(b)* growth in real earnings of three per cent. per year or *(c)* both these assumptions, whilst other assumptions in each case remained the same.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the annual cost of providing *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness and invalidity benefit, *(c)* retirement pensions and *(d)* widows' benefit at a level equivalent to the current adult supplementary benefit scale rate, excluding housing costs, for all adults currently claiming these benefits whose income is below the supplementary benefit scale rate level but who are not currently claiming supplementary benefit; how many individuals are involved in each case; and what would be the annual cost in respect of unemployment benefit if unemployment fell to, respectively, 3, 2½, 2, 1½ and 1 million.

Mr. Newton: The information is not available to provide detailed costings, and even the production of illustrative figures would take substantial time and be disproportionately costly.

Venereal Diseases

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what statistics are available to him as to the national incidence of venereal diseases amongst persons aged between 15 and 20 years of age; and what trend they show;

(2) what is the current trend of the nationwide incidence of venereal diseases.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

War Pensions

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the answer of 3 February, regarding disregard on war pensions, he will list those branches of the Royal British Legion which can readily be identified as having made representations on the subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Maternity Units

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* his Department's guidelines for the size of maternity units in teaching hospitals in terms of the number of live births each year.

Mr. Whitney: The Department has not issued such guidance. It is for health authorities to determine the size of maternity units needed to meet local demand. In doing so, factors such as the anticipated number of births, and the number of mothers and babies likely to require specialist care and facilities, will be taken into account.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of live births in each maternity unit in 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively, indicating which of those units are located in teaching hospitals.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as can be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost as soon as possible.

NHS Employees

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number and rate per 1,000 claimants of people who received single payments *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in each social security region, and *(c)* in each standard economic planning region for each year 1979 and to the latest available date in 1985 with the average payment and what proportion were (i) pensioners, (ii) families with children.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his rely*, 19 December 1985, c. *321-22*]: It is not possible to provide the precise information requested since data are available only for social security regions and nationally. The following table sets out the available information for the calendar years 1979-1985. Normally the data collected are not analysed by reference to families with children, but a special analysis of the data in the 1983 annual statistical inquiry showed that of families with children one-third had received a single payment in the previous 12 months.

Region	Number of awards (nearest '000s)	Rate of awards per 1,000 claimants	Average payment (to nearest £	Proportion of awards to persons over pension age
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
1979				
Northern	108	498	24	17
Yorkshire/Humberside	105	350	29	21
East Midlands/East Anglia	78	296	34	22
London North	86	307	36	33
London South	87	284	35	26
London West	71	311	41	27
South-West	72	324	32	24
Wales	78	409	30	24
West Midlands	102	355	32	27
North-West Manchester	56	254	27	23
Merseyside	81	346	29	20
Scotland	194	636	47	23
National	1,119	366	34	24
1980				
Northern	106	465	32	15
Yorkshire/Humberside	112	351	34	17
East Midlands/East Anglia	76	273	41	19
London North	81	275	44	28
London South	82	259	43	24
London West	66	278	50	24
South-West	62	279	39	23
Wales	76	381	36	22
West Midlands	91	291	40	25
North-West Manchester	53	227	35	18
Merseyside	81	329	34	17
Scotland	244	756	62	23
National	1,129	352	44	21
1981				
Northern	75	301	44	12
Yorkshire/Humberside	91	253	44	13
East Midlands/East Anglia	72	231	50	12
London North	58	172	62	20
London South	61	173	61	17
London West	45	165	65	17
South-West	42	169	52	19
Wales	68	317	46	15
West Midlands	77	206	51	16
North-West Manchester	63	237	46	12
Merseyside	71	264	46	13
Scotland	113	314	80	17
National	834	231	54	15
1982 (see note 3) National	1,596	385	55	19
1983				
North-Eastern	376	525	66	8
Midlands	293	400	69	9
London North	187	285	87	12
London South	166	293	75	11
Wales/South-West	217	402	66	11
North West	310	465	66	8
Scotland	324	730	101	12
National	1,873	433	76	10
1984				
North-Eastern	574	758	70	8
Midlands	452	573	59	8
London North	268	377	86	10
London South	206	327	87	10
Wales/South-West	302	526	71	10
North West	501	715	68	8
Scotland	545	1,127	89	12
National	2,849	613	76	9

Region	Number of awards (nearest '000s)	Rate of awards per 1,000 claimants	Average payment (to nearest £	Proportion of awards to persons over pension age
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
1985				
North-Eastern	862	n/a	70	9·8
Midlands	656	n/a	69	10·5
London North	390	n/a	82	13·4
London South	303	n/a	82	13·4
Wales/South-West	451	n/a	67	12·3
North West	691	n/a	71	8·6
Scotland	767	n/a	88	13
National	4,119	n/a	75	11·2

Notes:

1. The figures in columns (2), (4) and (5) are calculated from information collected by the Management Information System (MIS) which is a 100 per cent. of all single payment awards.

Column 2—the basis on which the figures are recorded was altered in April 1984. Previously a payment covering items under different regulations was counted as one award. Now an award is counted in respect of each regulation used.

Column 5—the MIS returns give separate figures for those over pension age but do not give a breakdown for families with children.

2. Column (3) is calculated by dividing the figures in column (2) by the number of claimants recorded in the August Quarterly Enquiry for each year. Figures for 1985 August Quarterly Enquiry are not yet available.

3. The 1982 regional breakdown is not given; during that year the regions were re-organised and reduced from 12 to 7, and comparable figures on a regional basis could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his reply on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *746*, he will publish a similar table showing the total weekly pensions assuming no change in the state earnings-related pension scheme, annual increases in the basic pension in line with average earnings, and that earnings increase in real terms by 1½ per cent. a year.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1986, c. *197-8*]: The following table gives the information requested. Amounts illustrated are total weekly state basic and earnings-related pensions assuming no change in the present earnings-related scheme and that basic pensions were increased in line with earnings from November 1985 onwards. As the hon. Member will be aware from the report by the Government Actuary on the financial effects of the Bill on the national insurance fund (Cmnd. 9711), on the same assumptions such pensions would require a combined contribution rate of 27·3 per cent. in 2033-34, compared with a notional rate of 15·7 per cent. in 1986-87.

Age in 1988 and earnings levels	Table number in the Technical Annex to the White Paper					
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
16 Low earner	128	128	99	99	*	*
Middle earner	171	171	119	119	*	*
High earner	206	206	149	149	*	*
20 Low earner	121	121	93	93	133	133
Middle earner	161	161	112	112	180	180
High earner	194	194	140	140	180	180
30 Low earner	104	104	81	78	115	112
Middle earner	139	139	97	93	155	155
High earner	167	167	121	115	155	155
40 Low earner	90	90	67	65	93	89
Middle earner	120	120	82	76	134	134
High earner	144	144	103	93	134	134

* Amounts were not shown for these cases in tables P5 and P6 of the Technical Annex.

Since my previous reply to the hon. Member on 17 January at column *746*, four minor errors in the accounts of the assumptions used in the tables, on pages 1 and 2 of the technical annex, have come to light, as follows:

Page 1, paragraph 1.3
Table P3
"Middle earner" and "high earner": 25 years and 15 years should read 26 and 14 respectively.

Table P4
"Low earner": 12 years should read 10.

Page 2, paragraph 1.8
"3¼ per cent." should read "3¾ per cent."

The projections in the technical annex, those in my reply of 17 January and in this reply are based on the assumptions as explained in pages 1 and 2 of the technical annex, amended as above.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Horses, Ponies and Donkeys

66. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on the practice of abandonment of horses, ponies and donkeys on wasteland.

Mr. Mellor: Since the beginning of 1985 the Government have received 27 letters on this subject from hon. and right hon. Members and 14 from members of the public.

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: The Home Office made the following grants to voluntary organisations in the financial year 1984-85.

	£
Grants administered by the voluntary service unit	
Action Resource Centre	27,000
Association of Researchers in Voluntary Action & Community Involvement	10,300
Barton, Oxford Community Computer Project	7,500
Birmingham Settlement	22,300
British Association for Counselling	4,500
British Association of Settlements & Social Action Centres	26,500
British Council of Churches (Community Work Resource Unit)	19,700
CETU	25,500
Church Army (Inner Cities Unit)	15,000
Community Projects Foundation	851,000
Community Service Volunteers	521,000
Community Transport	37,400
COPE	4,900
Councils for Voluntary Service—National Association	7,000
Councils for Voluntary Service—NCVO Consultancy Project	2,765
Coventry Voluntary Services Council (Media Project)	6,625
Drake Fellowship	15,000
Federation of Community Work Training Groups	22,850
Festival Welfare Services	21,000
Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments	25,000
Gamblers Anonymous—General Services Board	1,000
Hammersmith & Fulham Race RElations Project	22,000
Horticultural Therapy—Land use Volunteers	6,000
International Voluntary Service	19,000
Kent Volunteer Bureau	22,000
Leicestershire Race Awareness Consortium	22,200
Local Authorities Race Relations Information Exchange	845
Manchester Council for Voluntary Service	7,475
Merseyside Council for Voluntary Service	15,000
Midlands Group of Volunteer Organisers	23,880
National Association of Young People's Counselling & Advisory Services	26,200
National Council for Voluntary Organisations (Grant-in-Aid)	830,000
National Council for Voluntary Organisations (Management Development Unit)	2,250
National Council for the Welfare of Prisoners Abroad	12,000
National Federation of City Farms	26,500
National Federation of Community Organisations	89,500
Northern Association for Community Care (Bendrigg Lodge)	35,000
Pensioners Link (formerly Task Force)	93,000
Princedale Trust (for Release)	70,000
Retired Executives Action Clearing House	18,025
Sefton Community Resource Action Project	7,000
Standing Conference of Women's Organisations	3,250
Stonebridge (Harlesden) Bus Garage Project	20,000
Student Community Action Development Unit	23,900
Time for God	9,900
Turning Point (Lewisham)	8,000
United Funds	9,750
Volonteurope	1,875
Volunteer Centre	625,000
Warrington Workshop for Voluntary Action	10,700
West End Coordinated Voluntary Services	111,750
Women's Royal Voluntary Service (Grant-in-Aid)	4,380,000
Young Volunteer Resource unit of the National Youth Bureau	116,800
Grants for the development of local voluntary action scheme	
Special programme	
Hull Community Resources Development Project	19,100
North East Training for Community Work	25,910
Newham Parents Community Resource Programme	6,308
Salford Community Involvement Project	13,975
Social Care Assembly for Normanton, West Yorkshire	14,400
Training for Voluntary Organisations (Southampton)	13,500
Waveney Project (Suffolk)	11,250
Wiltshire Information Resource Exchange	18,800
Small Grants Scheme	
County Durham	9,270
Wrekin District	10,000
Charity Reviews	
Lancashire	17,600
Norfolk	8,896
Grants for Refugees	
Vietnamese Programme	265,000
British Refugee Council	400,152
Ockenden Venture	64,626
Grants (or grants-in-aid) to other bodies	
International Social Service of Great Britain	118,982
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	10,500
Grants administered by immigration and nationality department	
United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service	801,000
Grants administered by prison department	
Community Service Volunteers	96,030
Grants administered by criminal department	
Anchor Club, Leicester	8,750
Apex Trust	60,000
Birmingham Prisoners Visitors Centre	3,700
Bristol Prisoners Visitors Centre	1,191
Brixton Prisoners Visitors Centre	4,160
Burnbake Trust	12,275
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (grant-in-aid)	108,890
Circle Trust	36,400
Crypt Association, Wolverhampton	5,152
City Roads (Crisis Intervention) Ltd.	23,560
Dartmoor Accommodation Scheme	6,297
Family Welfare Association (grant-in-aid)	16,750
HACRO Crisis and Support Centre	5,150
Hampshire Care Trust	780
Hull Prison Visitors Centre	1,300
Institute of Marital Studies (grant-in-aid)	265,900
Jewish Marriage Education Council (grant-in-aid)	6,000

	£
Leeds Prisoners Visitors Centre	1,250
Lewes Prisoners Visitors Centre	115
Lifeline, Manchester	19,813
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (grant-in-aid)	583,985
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders—Education Advisory Service	24,850
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders—Education Development Officer	24,250
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders—Training Grant	115,492
National Association of Victims Support Scheme	50,000
National Association of Voluntary Hostels	37,568
National Marriage Guidance Council (grant-in-aid)	827,460
New Bridge	16,480
North East London St. Leonards Society	1,526
North Eastern Prison After-Care Society	832
Preston and District Lodgings Scheme	2,288
Prisoners Wives and Families Society	3,850
Prisoners Wives Service	6,910
St. Giles Day Centre	4,472
Society of Voluntary Associates (SOVA)	38,899
Special Needs Housing Advisory Service	5,200
South Yorkshire DACRO	3,620
Trinity Wet-shelter, Birmingham	17,200
York ACRO	14,309

Criminal Department also made grants for some 350 hostels and similar accommodation schemes, administered by voluntary organisations in which places are provided for offenders; and one-off grants to voluntary organisations providing day facilities and other services. In 1984-85 these grants totalled £4,481,577.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Hurd: The agencies concerned are the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission. In 1984-85 the CRE made grants to voluntary bodies of £3·828 million and the EOC made grants to voluntary bodies of £56,000.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Hurd: It is the clearly stated policy of the Home Office, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission that grants cannot be given to voluntary bodies and organisations for political purposes. Grants are monitored to confirm that money is spent for the purposes for which it is made available.

Reward Payments

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis which lists for each year since 1980 all reward payments above £5,000; and whether any individual in this category has received more than one reward payment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that no reward payment of more than £5,000 has been made by the Metropolitan police from public funds in any year since 1980. On occasion, in order to maintain the confidentiality of informants, the Metropolitan police also facilitate the payment of rewards offered by private institutions such as insurance companies, banks, etc. It is not the practice of the Metropolitan police to release details of any reward payments.

Criminal Injuries (Compensation)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid out in each of the past five years by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to someone subsequently found guilty of a criminal offence.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available; but in considering whether to make an award and, if so, of what amount, the board takes account of the applicant's character and way of life, and of his conduct before, during or after the events giving rise to the claims.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid out by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each of the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: The informaton requested is supplied in he table:

Year	*Compensation paid* £
1980-81	21,462,464
1981-82	21,976,696
1982-83	29,444,675
1983-84	32,820,772
1984-85	35,293,451

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid out to injured police officers by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each of the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: Information about the amount of compensation paid to police officers (as distinct from the number of cases in which awards were made to them) in respect of injuries incurred in the course of their duties is available, following a special monitoring exercise, only for four months from 4 June to 3 October 1984. During that period a total of about £568,000 was paid in compensation to 484 police officers.

Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions and on what dates in November 1985 *(a)* Martina Anderson, and *(b)* Ella O'Dwyer were subjected to strip searches in Brixton prison.

Mr. Mellor: My noble Friend is writing to the hon. Member.

Prisons

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to bring Her Majesty's prison department establishments under the public health regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: No. The primary responsibility for supervising hygiene standards in prison service establishments rests with the medical officers based at each establishment, who may call on the advice of environmental health officers as required. We see no need to alter these arrangements.

Police Manpower

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the applications he has received from police authorities in England for additional manpower in respect of 1986-87 and the increases in establishment which he has approved to date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 13 January 1986 at column 456, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and my hon. and learned Friend for Leicester, South (Mr. Spencer) on 23 January 1986 at column 272, for information about the applications received from police authorities for increases in their police establishments for the financial year 1985-86 or later, and the seven police authorities which have recently been informed that the Home Secretary is prepared to approve additional posts.

Prisoners (Disclosure of Information)

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is the practice of the prison service to disclose in response to inquiries from third parties whether a named individual is serving a prison sentence and the prison at which the sentence is being served.

Mr. Mellor: Information about individual inmates is not normally given to third parties without the consent of the inmate concerned. If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind, perhaps he would let me have details and I will look into it.

Passports (False Documentation)

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of false birth certificates produced by applicants for passports for the most recent period of 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Waddington: 175 cases were detected in the 11 months from March 1985 to January 1986, the fullest period for which information is available.

Stop Orders

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations about stop orders or deportation he received from right hon. and hon. Members in 1985 and each of the previous 10 years; how many of these were made in writing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The available information concerns the number of passengers on whose behalf hon. and right hon. Members have made representations against a decision to refuse entry, and is shown in the table:

	Numbers
1983	2,518
1984	3,532
1985	5,694

Comparable figures are not available for earlier years, but the number of representations in this category were running at about 1,000 a year from 1980 to 1982.

Leeds

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which new applications for funding of posts in Leeds under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966, made between April and October 1985, were allowed and which were not.

Mr. Waddington: The posts for which funding was agreed in this period were:

2 Community Development Officers
1 Employment Liaison Officer
1 Environmental Health Education Officer
4 Equal Opportunity Training Officers
1 Monitoring Assistant and 1 Clerical Assistant (for the Council's Employment Policy)
1 Neighbourhood Social Worker
2 Peripatetic Music Teachers
4 Social Welfare Officers

The posts for which funding was refused were:

1 Co-ordinator and 1 Warden for a housing association
1 Social Worker
1 Officer-in-charge and Nursery Officer for a community nursery
1 Assistant Cook and 6 Supervisory Assistants

In addition, an application made in respect of one post in October 1985 has not yet been determined.

Immigration

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide detailed figures for the past five years for the number of immigration appeals against the refusal for leave to enter which was successful under the Immigration Act 1971; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Information provided by the Immigration Appeals Secretariat on appeals against the refusal of leave to enter at ports of entry is given in the following table:

Appeals against refusal of leave to enter at ports of entry allowed and dismissed, 1981-1985

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Adjudicators					
Appeals allowed	65	60	44	72	65
Appeals dismissed	987	659	553	608	616
Total determined	1,052	719	597	680	681
Tribunal					

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Appeals allowed	*	8	6	18	13
Appeals dismissed	*	75	31	40	44
Total determined	*	83	37	58	57
of which: by Secretary of State to Tribunal					
Appeals allowed	*	1	—	5	2
Appeals dismissed	*	8	4	2	3
Total determined	*	9	4	7	5

* Not available

Dogfighting

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges have been brought following illegal dogfighting in the north-west; in how many of those cases the accused was convicted; and what was the average custodial sentence in such cases.

Mr. Mellor: Information collected centrally does not distinguish offences relating to dog fights from other offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Persons proceeded against, found guilty and sentenced in Magistrates' Courts for offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 England and Wales

Number of defendants

Year	Proceeded against	Found guilty	Committed for sentence	Detention centre	Unsuspended imprisonment
1977	640	557	1	11	8
1978	704	605	1	7	3
1979	669	598	—	3	7
1980	809	719	—	—	11
1981	833	719	—	1	10
1982	820	728	—	2	6
1983	839	747	—	4	10
1984	875	764	—	1	10

Race Relations

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of racial harassment have been recorded in each police district in the Metropolitan police area by year since 1983.

Mr. Mellor: The term "racial harassment" has no standard definition and no figures are available for it. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information on recorded racial incidents by police district is as given in the following table. The changes may reflect changes in the extent of recording rather than changes in the numbers of incidents occurring.

Racial incidents recorded in the Metropolitan Police District by district

District	1983	1984	1985
A, C and D Westminster	11	16	16
B Kensington	2	8	5
E Camden	38	48	62
F Hammersmith	13	13	11
G Hackney	31	29	37
H Tower Hamlets	234	414	277
I West Drayton, Staines, Heathrow	4	3	0
J Waltham Forest, Redbridge etc.	53	41	135
K Havering, Barking, Newham	132	181	271
L Lambeth	34	33	73
M Southwark	28	29	49
N Islington	31	60	57
P Lewisham, Bromley	32	30	34
Q Brent, Harrow, Bushey	67	121	178
R Greenwich, Bexley	116	102	128
S Barnet etc.	56	45	52
T Richmond, Hounslow, Sunbury	86	72	90
V Kingston, Merton, Esher	62	39	78
W Wandsworth	74	60	67
X Ealing, Hillingdon	74	73	130
Y Haringey, Enfield etc.	39	45	80
Z Croydon, Sutton etc.	59	53	107
Total MPD	1,276	1,515	1,937

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of reported racial incidents in the Metropolitan police area for each year since 1983, by type of incident, the number of arrests and the number of subsequent convictions.

Mr. Mellor: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the available information is as given in the following table. Information on convictions following racial incidents is not available.

Racial incidents recorded in the Metropolitan police district by type of incident

Number of incidents

Type	1984 Total	1984 Resulting in one or more arrests	1985 Total	1985 Resulting in one or more arrests
Serious assault	322	91	349	127
Minor assault	189	22	241	24
Criminal damage	599	43	606	61
Leafletting	20	0	20	0
Abusive threatening or insulting behaviour	233	29	518	59
Slogan writing	70	1	98	6
Racial discrimination	15	1	20	1
Disputes	22	3	24	1
Other	45	7	61	7
Total	1,515	197	1,937	286

Metropolitan Police (Specialist Squads)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by rank of those members of the following Metropolitan police specialist squads: central drugs squad, anti-terrorist branch, City police fraud branch, royalty and diplomatic protection department, serious crimes branch, central robbery squad, regional crime squad, criminal intelligence department, special branch, central information unit, national drugs intelligence unit and national identification branch.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information asked for in respect of the central information unit, the national drugs intelligence unit and the national identification bureau is given in the attached table. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis considers that to give similar information about the other squads and units listed might compromise their operational effectiveness.

Metropolitan police—breakdown by rank of certain specialist squads and units as at 4 November 1985

	A8 (Central Information Unit)	National Drugs Intelligence Unit*	National Identification Bureau
Commander			
Uniform	—	—	—
CID	—	—	1
Chief Superintendent			
Uniform	—	—	—
CID	—	1	1
Superintendent			
Uniform	1	—	—
CID	—	(1)	2
Chief Inspector			
Uniform	—	—	—
CID	—	3	4
Inspector			
Uniform	—	—	—
CID	1	3 (5)	12
Sergeant			
Uniform	2	—	—
CID	—	4 (7)	15
Constable			
Uniform	2	—	—
CID	—	2	59
Total			
Uniform	5	—	—
CID	1	13 (13)	94

* Figures in brackets show the number of officers from provincial forces attached to the National Drug Intelligence Unit.

Community Radio

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* his reasons for the oversight of community radio, particularly in respect of political balance, for the two-year experimental period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Community radio is being established on an experimental basis, and we shall therefore want to undertake research into its output and impact with a view to taking informed decisions about its future. In addition, as the experimental stations will broadcast under licences issued by the Department, the question of their adherence to the conditions of their licences will be my right hon. Friend's responsibility. However, as the published guidance notes for prospective licensees make clear, there will be no obligation on them to balance programmes expressing political points of view.

SCOTLAND

Crown Immunity

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the review of Crown immunity in respect of hospital kitchens in Scotland has been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I have concluded that the existence of Crown immunity from the food hygiene provisions of the Food and Drugs (Scotland) Act 1956 in hospital kitchens is a factor which can have the effect of detracting from the responsibility of those most directly in a position to control the hygienic preparation of food.

I share the conclusion of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services that stronger safeguards are needed to underpin management efforts and to protect the patients. Accordingly legislation to be introduced in the present Session will be applied in Scotland to remove Crown immunity from hospital catering in respect of the Food Hygiene Regulations by making health authorities subject to the relevant provisions of legislation dealing with food.

Strengthened guidance will be given to the Health Service on measures to ensure high food hygiene standards. The Government are determined to spare no effort to secure the highest standards of food hygiene in hospitals.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, columns *429-32*, if he will make a statement concerning the £28,774 written off as bad debts by the Lothian health board in 1984-85.

Mr. John MacKay: The sum written off represents £24,634 in respect of debts dating from 1975 of overseas visitors treated in hospitals in the health board area and £4,140 due by private patients which remained unpaid despite repeated efforts to effect recovery. In all cases it is no longer considered cost-effective to continue to pursue recovery. Guidance issued since 1981 advises health boards to seek deposits in line with estimated treatment costs to avoid bad debts arising, and I am satisfied that this is now the practice.

Boards of Governors

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland to whom chairmen of boards of governors of colleges of education in Scotland are responsible for the actions taken by them.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Latent Damage

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he plans to review the law on latent damage, particularly in buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I am aware of the concern expressed in Scotland about the existing law and of the decision to legislate for England and Wales in the light of the Law Reform Committee's report on latent damage.

In Scotland, time limits on actions arising as a result of latent damage are governed by the law on prescription and limitation. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has Ministerial responsibility for changes in that law and he has invited the Scottish Law Commission to consider the problems which arise and to report to him with their recommendations. The commission has agreed to do so.

Scottish Health Service

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received requests for further consultation following the consultative letter on general management at unit level in the Scottish Health Service issued by the Scottish Home and Health Department on 8 July 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: More than 60 comments have been received in response to the Department's letter. A number of health boards and several of the professional organisations requested further opportunities for comment following the conclusion of the study of unit management which the Department commissioned from Coopers and Lybrand Associates.

In order to give those who will be most effected by future developments in general management a further opportunity to discuss and contribute to those developments, I have decided that it would be useful to have a further period of consultation. When the Coopers and Lybrand study is concluded, the Scottish Home and Health Department will prepare and issue for comment a draft circular of guidance on the development of unit general management. This will be based on the report of the Coopers and Lybrand study and on the responses to the consultative letter of 8 July 1985. A summary of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations from the Coopers and Lybrand study, prepared by the company, will accompany the draft circular. The full report of the study will not be an appropriate document for public consultation as it will contain material confidential to the four health boards which are participating in the study. I expect the draft circular and summary to be issued for comment in early May and, in order to avoid unnecessary delay and uncertainty about future developments, comments will be requested by mid July.

Ministers will consider the results of this further consultation in the course of the summer and final guidance on general management at unit level will be issued in time for health boards to plan implementation following the holiday period.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Ms. Harman asked the Paymaster General if he will estimate how many building workers in the London borough of Southwark are unemployed.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available.

Data on the occupations of the unemployed are derived from the labour force survey, and cannot be provided for areas smaller than regions.

Crown Notices

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Paymaster General how many Crown notices have been served by inspectors of factories in each of the last five years; and how many instances have been recorded of failure to comply with a Crown notice over the same period.

Mr. Trippier: The figures are as follows:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Number of Crown notices served	82	90	53	49
Number complied with	80	81	51	44
Number not complied with by due date	nil	nil	nil	nil

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Number of notices where the time limit has not expired, has been extended or where the circumstances have changed	2	9	2	5

The figures for 1985 are not yet available.

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Paymaster General if he is satisfied with the operation of the Crown notice system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The chairman of the Health and Safety Commission wrote to my right hon. and noble Friend on 23 September 1985 expressing the Commission's continuing concern about the different sanctions applying to Crown and non-Crown bodies under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act. It wished to give further consideration to certain aspects of the matter. I await its advice.

Clothing Industry

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on his Department's study of clothing industry employment.

Mr. Trippier: My Department's employment market research unit has recently issued an appraisal replying to criticisms of its report made by researchers at the Department of Applied Economics, Cambridge. A copy has been placed in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Weapons

Q34. **Mr. Foot** asked the Prime Minister if she will set up an inquiry into health and safety in the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons industry.

The Prime Minister: No. Nuclear weapons development and production facilities are subject to health and safety standards which are at least as rigorous as those applied to any similar industry. Achievement of these standards is confirmed by regular monitoring and by independent inspection by the appropriate regulatory and environmental authorities. While I am aware that certain suggestions have been made in regard to health and safety in this area, I have seen no soundly based scientific evidence to support such views.

EC (Food Exports)

Q85. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the effect on the economies of the Soviet Union and East Europe of the Community's policy of providing subsidised food to these countries.

The Prime Minister: If it seems appropriate to raise the common agricultural policy at the next meeting of the European Council, I shall bear in mind the aspect to which my hon. Friend refers.

Engagements

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Flannery asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Stern asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Dubs asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Yeo asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Westland plc

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister whether any attempt was made by the Cabinet Office to find out if Ministers would be available for a meeting to discuss Westland plc on the afternoon of Friday 13 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my speech in the House on 15 January at column 1094.

Crimes of Violence

Mr. Terlezki asked the Prime Minister if she will seek to discuss at the earliest possible opportunity with the President of the United States of America and others the formation of a multinational unit to counter politically motivated crimes of violence.

The Prime Minister: There is already extensive international co-operation against terrorism and frequent discussions with our allies. However, for operational and legal reasons, defence against a particular terrorist attack must remain a national responsibility.

Unemployment (Costs)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister if she will state the latest figures for the overall cost of *(a)* unemployment benefits, together with all other social security payments to the unemployed, *(b)* central Government training programmes designed to reduce unemployment, *(c)* central Government payments to industry designed to reduce unemployment, and *(d)* the combined total of such expenditure.

The Prime Minister: The overall cost of social security benefits to the unemployed in 1985-86 is estimated to be about £6,800 million.

Central Government expenditure on training programmes both for adults and for young people has as its prime objective the promotion of competitiveness through improving the skills of the work force. It is estimated to be about £1,060 million in 1985-86.

Central Government expenditure specifically directed towards reducing unemployment is incurred via the Department of Employment's employment measures.

Expenditure on these is estimated to be about £1,050 million in 1985-86. Of this, about £30 million is expected to be paid to industry principally via the young workers scheme.

Given the different purposes for which this expenditure is incurred, it would be misleading to aggregate these figures.

Public Sector Employees

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister if she will state the total number of *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* all other public sector employees in each of the years 1979 and 1985, giving in each case the percentage decrease and the combined percentage decrease since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom figures (thousands) on a full-time equivalents basis are as follows:

Mid-year	*Civil Service*	*Other public sector*	
		Actual	*Excluding corporations subsequently privatised*
1979	724	5,863	5,483
1980	700	5,845	5,460
1981	684	5,707	5,405
1982	659	5,547	5,276
1983	643	5,455	5,205
1984	619	5,388	5,144
1985	596	5,063	5,063

Source: Her Majesty's Treasury and Economic Trends December 1985.

Between 1979 and 1985 there was a fall in employment in the Civil Service of 18 per cent. and in the rest of the public sector of 14 per cent.; total public sector employment fell by 14 per cent. Excluding the effects on employment levels of companies privatised there was a fall in employment in the rest of the public sector of 8 per cent. and in the total public sector of 9 per cent.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the decision to proceed with a rail-only fixed link across the Channel.

Mr. David Mitchell: Since 20 January we have received a small number of letters about the fixed link, the majority from people who oppose the decision to proceed.

BR (Capital Investment)

Mr. Greg Knight asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much capital investment has been approved for British Rail in each year from 1974 to date.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government have given specific approval for investment projects worth the following amounts in each year since May 1979 (comparable details are not readily available for the earlier years):

Year	*Investments Approved (£ million) at 1985-86 prices*
1979	27
1980	—
1981	70
1982	57
1983	87
1984	450
1985	257

BR now holds forward approval for £1,200 million worth of projects out of the £2 billion programme included in its 1985 five-year corporate plan.

Motor Cars (Spare Wheels)

Mr. Conlan asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report of the Office of Fair Trading on non-standard motor car spare wheels.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for publishing reports made by the Office of Fair Trading. The office tells me that it has not prepared such a report.

Motor Cyclists

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received from bodies representing motor cycling interests about aspects of existing legislation affecting motor cyclists, especially learners; and what assessment he makes of the extent of correlation between the existence of legislative controls and the level of sales of new motor cycles;

(2) what information he has as to the impact of legislation concerning learner motor cyclists on the level of sales of new motor cycles; what representations the motor cycle trade has made about existing legislation affecting motor cyclists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is regular contact between the Department and the principal bodies representing the motor cycle industry and riders, in the course of which their views on existing legislation have been made clear. We have also received comments from a large number of individuals.

The views of interested organisations and individuals are being taken into account during our current review of motor cycle licensing, training and testing.

I am not aware of any satisfactory evidence to suggest that legislative measures have had more than marginal effect on the overall levels of motor cycle sales.

Air Travel Reserve Fund

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to wind up the air travel reserve fund and to dissolve the agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend has today laid an order before the House under section 6 of the Air Travel Reserve Fund Act 1975. The order provides for the fund to be wound up on 27 February and for the assets in it to be transferred to the trustees of the Air Travel Trust. Copies of the trust deed have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The agency itself will be dissolved on 30 June. In the period from 27 February until its dissolution the agency will prepare a statement of accounts and a report on its last year of operations.

The fund currently stands at over £20 million and the trust deed allows the trustees to supplement that with insurance, which it is doubtful that the agency would have been able to do. The new arrangements will also streamline the system, ensuring faster pay-outs and greater discretion in dealing with claims.

With more people going on air package holidays this summer, they can do so safe in the knowledge that financially they are well protected against an operator's collapse.

Roads (Lighting and Signs)

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many miles of the M4 motorway between London and Pont Abraham are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(2) how many miles of the M5 motorway between Birmingham and Exeter are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(3) how many miles of the M3 motorway between London and Southampton are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(4) how many miles of the M2 motorway between Rochester and Faversham are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(5) how many miles of the M62 motorway between Liverpool and Wakefield are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(6) how many miles of the M62 motorway between Hull and Wakefield are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(7) if his Department intends to carry out any electrification work on the unlit section of the M1 motorway between junctions 26 to 29;

(8) if his Department intends to carry out any electrification work on the unlit section of the M1 motorway between Newport Pagnell and junction 18;

(9) if his Department intends to carry out any electrification work on the unlit section of the M1 motorway between junction 17 and junction 24;

(10) how many miles of the M6 motorway between Rugby and Carlisle are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(11) how many miles of the M26 between Sevenoaks and Wrotham heath are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(12) how many miles of the M27 between Cadnam and Portsmouth are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(13) how many miles of the M25 orbital motorway are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(14) how many miles of the M32 between Bristol and Parkway are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(15) how many miles of the M40 between Denham and Oxford are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(16) how many miles of the M10-St. Albans bypass are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(17) how many miles of the M11 between London and Cambridge are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(18) how many miles of the M18 between Rotherham and Goole are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(19) how many miles of the M20 between London and Folkestone are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections;

(20) how many miles of the M23 between Hooley and Pease Pottage are unlit; and if he will list the unlit sections.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1985, c. *296-7*]: Some information sought by the right hon. Gentleman has subsequently become available and I am able to provide this within the cost ceiling to which I must have regard. The information now available is as follows:

Between London and Pont Abraham 87 miles of the M4 are unlit in England.
Between Birmingham and Exeter 115 miles of the M5 are unlit.
Between London and Southampton 48 miles of the M3 are unlit.
Between Rochester and Faversham 25 miles of the M2 are unlit.
Between Liverpool and Wakefield 21·3 miles of the M62 are unlit.
Between Hull and Wakefield 36·3 miles of the M62 are unlit.
Between Rugby and Carlisle 168 miles of the M6 are unlit.
Between Sevenoaks and Wrotham Heath 9·3 miles of the M26 are unlit.
Between Cadnam and Portsmouth 28 miles of the M27 are unlit.
52 miles of the M25 are unlit
The M32 is the responsibility of Avon County Council.
Between Denham and Oxford 27 miles of the M40 are unlit.
The entire 3 miles length of the M10-St. Albans by-pass are unlit.
Between London and Cambridge 45 mile of the M11 are unlit.
Between Rotherham and Goole 25·3 miles of the M18 are unlit.
Between London and Folkestone 36·3 miles of the M20 are unlit.
Between Hooley and Pease Pottage 16 miles of the M23 are unlit.

The need for electrification works on motorways is kept under review by my Department. Plans presently exist to install further lighting on the M1 between Newport Pagnell and junction 16.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Meetings

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the regular meetings which he expects to attend or be represented at in 1986 of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and its DAC committee FCO international fund for agricultural developments, the World Health Organisation, the European Economic Community and the EPF.

Mr. Eggar: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Western European Union

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards Portugal's application for membership of Western European Union; and if he will make a statement;

(2) why a decision has not been taken by the Western European Union on Portugal's application for membership; when a decision is expected to be taken; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards enlargement of the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The question of the possible enlargement of the WEU is currently under consideration. Ministers agreed at Bonn on 22-23 April 1985 that, once the process of reactivating and reorganising the WEU had been completed, the Council should consider the principles which should govern possible WEU enlargement. The Council would then, on the basis of these general principles, consider individual cases, particularly that of Portugal which applied for membership in October 1984.

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what approaches have been received by the Western European Union from Spain about possible Spanish membership of the organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Spain has not applied to join the WEU.

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who is the representative of the United Kingdom on the Western European Union public administration committee.

Mr. Eggar: The United Kingdom is represented on the Western European Union public administration committee by a Home Civil Service principal grade officer in the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office).

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with the Spanish Government covering possible Spanish membership of the Western European Union.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific measures the Government are promoting to seek to improve public information about the Western European Union Council and about the other organs of the Western European Union; and what measures are currently being taken by the Western European Union in this direction.

Mr. Eggar: The Government maintain contact with representatives of the media, academic life, and members of Parliament to inform them about the activities of the WEU and its Council. Ministers regularly address the six-monthly sessions of the WEU assembly in Paris. As part of the process of reorganising WEU institutions a new post has been created in the WEU secretariat in London with responsibility for public relations and information. The Government support this initiative, and other publicity activities of the WEU.

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the budgetary implications of the measures which have been taken, and of those which are being taken, to reinvigorate the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The measures agreed by the Council of the Western European Union to reinvigorate the organisation have been undertaken with respect for existing budgetary limits. It is the Government's policy, and the policy of many of our allies, to maintain zero real growth in the administrative budgets of international organisations, inclusive of pensions.

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwelath Affairs what new agencies have been established by the Western European Union since the Rome declaration of October 1984; what relationship is envisaged between these agencies and the Standing Armaments Committee and Agency for the Control of Armaments; and what relationship is envisaged between the new agencies and the Assembly of the Western European Union, and between the new agencies and the council.

Mr. Eggar: WEU Ministers decided at Bonn in April 1985 that three new agencies of the Western European Union should be established. They were:

i) the agency for the study of arms control and disarmament questions;

ii) The agency for the study of security and defence questions;

iii) The agency for the development of co-operation in the field of armaments.

These agencies were established with effect from 1 January 1986.

The director of agency I has a dual capacity as director for the agency for the control of armaments; his deput in that capacity is a member of the staff of agency I.

The role of WEU in armaments co-operation is to help provide the necessary political impetus for, and practical contribution to, the various efforts undertaken in this field, incuding those carried out by the independent European programme group, the main forum for European equipment co-operation, and the conference of national armaments directors. The standing armaments committee will help ensure that the work of agency III is fully co-ordinated with the activities of theses other organisations.

The new agencies will be responsible to the WEU Secretary-General in London and, through him, to the WEU Council. The Council will maintain overall control of the agencies' word programmes. The Council considers that the agencies should provide technical assistance to the assembly on a case-by-case basis and in conformity with criteria to be agreed in the light of individual requests.

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new posts have been created within the Secretariat-General of the Western European Union and within other organs of the Western European Union since the Rome declaration of October 1984; what responsibilities and salaries these posts carry; which of them have been filled and by whom; by what means new staff are being recruited; and what steps are being taken to keep *(a)* Parliament and *(b)*the assembly of the Western European Union, informed of such developments occurring in the course of the Western European Union reinvigoration process.

Mr. Eggar: I am arranging for the detailed information requested on posts to be assembled and to be published in the *Official Report* as soon as possible. Information about developments arising from WEU reactivation is reported regularly by the Council and Secretary General to the WEU assembly, British members of which are drawn from Parliament.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list his engagements for the afternoon of 13 December stating on which date each engagement was arranged.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I went from a meeting of the North Atlantic Council via Gatwick to Chevening.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he proposes to make any further changes to his Department's cash limits for 1985-86.

Mr. Eggar: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the cash limit for Class II, Vote 1 (Overseas Representation, Diplomatic, Consular and other Foreign and Commonwealth Services) will be increased by £5,155,000 from £384,277,000 to £389,432,000 and the cash limit for Vote 4 (British Council) will be increased by £1,645,000 from £48,459,000 to £50,104,000. The increases in both cases take account of unavoidable increased costs net of offsetting savings. The increase will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

WALES

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information requested is as follows:

Voluntary bodies in receipt of Welsh Office grants in 1984-85

	£
Academi Gymreig	30,696
Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit	51,843
Age Concern	35,500
Antur Waunfawr	35,000
Arfon Shop Project	31,500
Ash in Wales	3,000
Association of Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes	5,830
Barnardo's	117,141
Boys Brigade	4,138
Boys Clubs	27,059
British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering	37,725
Bwrdd Ffilmiau Cymraeg	7,000
Capital Grants to Voluntary Youth Services, Village Halls and Community Centres	333,752
Cardiff Universities Social Services	150,757
Catholic Childrens Society	30,024
Christ College Brecon	48,289
Church in Wales Provincial Youth Services	10,249
Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust Ltd.	90,171
Clwyd Voluntary Services Council	54,541
Coleg Harlech	568,920
College of Librarianship, Wales	295
Council for Education in World Citizenship (Cymru)	1,575
Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services	73,212
Cwmni Theatr Cymru	25,000
DRIVE	40,950
Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.	112,042
Dyfed Association of Volunteery Services	60,853
Employment Fellowship	3,350
Family Planning Association	8,750
Girl Guides	9,866
Grant in Aid to Voluntary Organisations under Opportunities for Voluntaring Scheme	190,000
Gwent Community Services Council	30,270
Gwent and Glamorgan Archaeological Trust Ltd.	116,919
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Ltd.	85,655
Gwynedd Rural Council	75,231
Gwynedd Social Care Project	25,000
Howells School, Denbigh	96,156
Howells School, Llandaff	144,940
INSTEP/CETYCW	3,500
Intermediate Treatment Scheme	12,223
International Youth Year	22,892
Llandovery College	31,013
MENCAP (Pengwern Hall)	21,000
MENCAP in Wales	84,250
Merched y Wawr	10,000
MIND	40,515
Monmouth School for Boys	134,170
Monmouth School for Girls	52,599
Mudiad Cymraeg Casnewydd	150
Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin	200,000
National Children's Homes	28,035
National Council on Alcoholism	8,800
National Cyrenians	1,130
National Gypsy Council	1,050
National Scientific Association	1,000
Papurau Bro	21,350
Parents for Welsh Medium Education	500
Penrhos College, Colwyn Bay	62,844
£ for £ scheme for Mentally Handicapped Children	11,500
Powys Community Support Scheme	17,872
Powys Rural Council	63,011
Presbyterian Church in Wales (Youth Services)	3,563
Pre School Playgroup Association—Wales	97,450
Royal National Eisteddfod	150,000
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	80,000
Rydal School, Colwyn Bay	56,865
South Glamorgan Intervol	13,400
Standing Conference of Voluntary Organisations	22,575
St. John's Ambulance Brigade	10,613
Sunday Schools Council	12,500
Swansea Accommodation for Single Homeless	2,930
Trinity College	1,809,000
TS Indefatigable	10,684
Ty Nyth Hostel	2,625
Under Five Initiative	380
Union of Welsh Independents	2,090
Urdd Gobaith Cymru	240,296
Wales Council for the Blind	11,150
Wales Council for the Deaf	14,900
Wales Council for the Disabled	49,250
Wales Council for Voluntary Action	150,000
Welsh Association of Youth Clubs	44,277
Welsh Books Council	352,500
Welsh Chess Union	3,014
Welsh Housing Aid	20,400
Welsh Housing Association Council	3,000
Welsh National Centre for Children's Literature	14,000
Welsh National Council of YMCA's	23,761
Welsh School, London	5,000
Welsh Scout Council	11,693
Welsh Womens Aid	9,860
West Glamorgan Community Service Council	26,500
Women's Institute	6,000
Workers Educational Association	268,853
Young Farmers Clubs	15,000
Youth Hostels Association	12,199

In addition, a large number of payments amounting to £1,241,700, were made to voluntary education bodies in 1984-85 under the provisions of the Education Acts 1944 and 1980. To list payments to individual bodies and to distinguish between payments made under each Act would involve disproportionate costs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid who in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The non-departmental public bodies in Wales for which we are responsible which provide financial support for voluntary bodies are listed as follows:

Government Funding 1984-85

	£ million
Cwmbran Development Corporation	4·006
Development Board for Rural Wales	8·974
Sports Council for Wales	2·852
Wales Tourist Board	6·365
Welsh Development Agency	40·900

Source: "Public Bodies 1985".

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Grants to voluntary organisations are made for specific purposes, and are monitored to ensure that they are used for these purposes. Grants are not available to support party political activity.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the last 10 years for which figures are available, the amounts of money paid by his Department, whether directly or indirectly through some other agency, to organisations and bodies working in the field of health education, detailing the organisations and bodies concerned, the amounts they received and the method of payment.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information requested is given in the following table:

£000s

	1975-76	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Health Education Council*	68·2	80·4	100·7	105·0	110·2	146·7	289·6	315·4	486·0	503·0
Welsh Heart Programme	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20·0
Action on Smoking and Health	—	0·8	0·8	1·0	1·5	1·6	1·3	1·6	1·7	3·0
Family Planning Association	—	1·3	5·0	6·3	6·2	3·5	5·9	7·4	4·5	8·8
Order of St. John Priory for Wales	—	1·0	2·0	3·9	5·1	6·0	7·9	8·3	9·7	10·2
Local Councils on Alcoholism†	—	—	—	—	30·0	11·5	12·0	33·0	15·4	8·8
South Wales Association for the Prevention of Addiction‡	4·5	5·3	5·3	6·0	6·1	7·1	7·6	8·0	8·5	9·3
The Council for Wales for Voluntary Youth Services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5·1

Notes:
* Paid via the Department of Health and Social Security.
† Paid via the National Council on Alcoholism.
‡ Paid via South Glamorgan County Council. First four years estimated.

Grants were paid direct to the bodies concerned, except where indicated.

Land Reclamation

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Wales what the total acreage of derelict land in Wales was in (i) 1975 and (ii) 1985, or the last year for which figures are available; and what the total acreage of derelict land within those figures is attributable to coal mining activities.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: A survey of derelict land in Wales was carried out in 1972 and this identified 34,000 acres of derelict land of which about 50 per cent. was thought to be attributable to coal mining activities. The latest estimate by the Welsh Development Agency, taking account of land reclaimed and new dereliction, is that these figures are still broadly accurate.

Russian Teaching

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Wales in how many schools in Wales Russian is taught.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information supplied by the Welsh joint education committee indicates that there were six schools in Wales where Russian was examined as a GCE subject in the summer of 1985.

Departmental Staff (Equality)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he takes to satisfy himself that there is equality of opportunity for both sexes in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: An equal opportunities officer has been designated within my Department's personnel management division. The officer has responsibility for advising senior management on the application and monitoring of the Civil Service policy on non-discrimination. The officer also provides advice on the implementation of the programme of action on equal opportunities recommended by the joint review group of the Civil Service National Whitley Council's joint personnel management committee.

Task Forces

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to set up a task force in Cardiff to tackle urban decay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Urban redevelopment in Cardiff is being pursued in a vigorous and concerted way by the local authorities and the private sector with substantial encouragement and support from our Department and other bodies. I have no plans to set up a special task force in Cardiff.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to set up a task force to tackle urban and environmental blight in Mid-Glamorgan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I fully recognise the urban and environmental problems of Mid-Glamorgan and these were taken into account in allocating to that county almost 25 per cent. of the Department's urban programme resources for 1986-87. The Welsh Development Agency is also pursuing an active programme of land reclamation and environmental improvement in the county. The Department works closely with the agency and the local authorities, but I have under continual review the question of improved co-ordination.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has conducted any studies to establish why cervical cancer incidence was some 11 per cent. higher in Wales than in the United Kingdom as a whole between 1979 and 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Whilst in Wales the incidence of cervical cancer was recorded as being higher than the United Kingdom as a whole between 1979 and 1983, in the same period comparable English standard regions such as the northern region, Yorkshire and Humberside and the north-west recorded a higher rate. Although there are no plans for a special Welsh study, account is taken of the ongoing research into this form of cancer.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to facilitate a decline in the incidence of cervical cancer in Wales; and how much he estimates will need to be spent by his Department to implement the recommendations of his Department's working party in this matter.

Mr. Mark Robinson: We are taking steps to reduce the incidence of death from this disease through screening women in the groups at risk. Early detection is important as the disease is amenable to treatment if diagnosed in the early stages. The joint NHS/Welsh Office working party reported last August and recommended ways in which the administration of this service could be improved. The screening service is managed on a district basis and its funding is the responsibility of the health authority concerned. The Welsh Office is funding the provision of computers for all the family practitioner committees in Wales and this will facilitate the administration of the scheme. It is anticipated that all FPC computers will be operational by the autumn. £400,000 is being earmarked for 1986-87 for centrally funding development of cancer screening services.

The Department is separately considering a bid by South Glamorgan health authority for the allocation of centrally funded development money to improve training facilities for medical laboratory staff, which could benefit the whole of Wales.

ENVIRONMENT

Liverpool Ice Rink

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of Liverpool ice rink.

Mr. John Patten: Since the Liverpool ice rink is a privately owned company, any decisions on future operations should rest primarily with the owner. However, I recognise that a decline in attendances over recent years has led to the ice rink becoming increasingly dependent on public sector financial support. In addition to £300,000 provided by my Department and the Sports Council in capital grants to improve the facility, urban programme support has been given in partnership with Merseyside county council in the form of a £35,000 bank loan guarantee and grants to offset revenue deficit including a monthly grant of £7,000 currently.

Such funding will cease on the abolition of Merseyside county council since Liverpool city council has so far not indicated an intention to take over any financial assistance, and my Department does not have the powers to maintain urban programme support in the absence of a sponsoring local authority. However, I understand the owner is currently seeking an opportunity to discuss the future of the ice rink with Liverpool city council.

Local Authorities (Lost Revenue)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to how much revenue was lost by local authorities in 1984-85 by defaulting tenants failing to pay rents.

Mr. John Patten: Provisional figures indicate that about £200 million in rent (excluding the rates and service charges elements) was owed by tenants to local authorities for the 1984-85 financial year. A substantial proportion of this is unlikely to be recovered. Details of local authority rent arrears will be placed in the Library shortly.

Flats (Freehold)

Mrs. Roe asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to give residents of blocks of flats the first right to refusal when the landlord wishes to sell the freehold.

Mr. John Patten: A right of first refusal for residents of blocks of flats if the landlord wishes to sell the freehold is one of the recommendations in the report of the Nugee committee on the management of privately owned blocks of flats. We are considering this and the committee's other recommendations as a matter of urgency, and I will announce the Government's conclusions as quickly as possible.

Dog Licences

Miss Fookes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest figure for the administrative cost of collecting dog licence fees; and how this compares with total receipts.

Mrs. Rumbold: The total amount to be paid by my Department to the Post Office in respect of the costs of issuing dog licences in 1985-86 is £3·5 million. The revenue raised from dog licences is expected to be about £900,000.

Local Authorities (Capital Receipts)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of money held by local authorities in capital receipts; and how much is held by each authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is estimated that at the end of 1984-85 local authorities in England held about £5·8 billion of accumulated capital receipts which, subject to the relevant prescribed proportions, give rise to spending permission under the capital control system. Not all of this total is backed by cash; some of the cash has been used for purposes, such as debt repayment, which do not extinguish the spending permission. Figures for the accumulated receipts of individual local authorities are not available centrally but the Department is currently undertaking an exercise to collect them.

Hedgerows and Amenity Woodlands

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to encourage farmers to leave strips of unploughed land under and around hegerows; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is Government policy to encourage farmers to adopt all sensible measures to assist in conservation of the countryside.

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to encourage preservation and plantation of hedgerows and amenity woodlands.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Forestry Commission, the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service and local authorities encourage preservation and plantation of hedgerows and amenity woodlands. The Department works with these bodies to this end. Encouragement is provided by such means as grant-aid, advisers, demonstration farms, and pamphlets. Last year, the Forestry Commission launched a new scheme to encourage the planting and rehabilitation of broadleaved woodlands. The Department provides financial and other support to the Tree Council, which itself promotes the planting and care of amenity trees, and sponsors an arboricultural research programme.

THE ARTS

Museums and Art Galleries (Funding)

Mr. Adley asked the Minister for the Arts if he will list, for all those museums and art galleries in receipt of central Government funds, the total central Government funding for each of the last five years for which figures are available together with his assessment of the relevant figures for the current year.

Mr. Luce: Voted net expenditure from the arts and libraries programme on the 11 museums and galleries for which I am directly responsible totalled as follows:

Year	*£ million cash outturn*
1981-82	62·806
1982-83	73·584
1983-84	76·560
1984-85	83·095
*1985-86	87·586

* estimated.

These figures include provision where applicable for purchase grants, for other net running costs, and for the building and maintenance programme undertaken by the Property Services Agency. For the years up to 1984-85, they also include funding of the local museum purchase grant schemes, responsibility for which was transferred from the Victoria and Albert and Science museums to the Museums and Galleries Commission in 1985-86.

Export Licences

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts whether a press notice was issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries on 22 January publicising the information in his reply to the hon. Member for Warley, East on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *208*, relating to the suspension over a half-year period of licences for the export of works of art.

Mr. Luce: A press notice publicising the information contained in my reply to the hon. Member on 22 January was issued by the Office of Arts and Libraries on 22 January.

Liverpool Empire and Philharmonic Hall

Mr. Parry asked the Minister for the Arts (1) when he expects to reply to the letter of 15 January from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, seeking a meeting to discuss the future of the Liverpool empire and the Philharmonic hall;

(2) if he will meet the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, to discuss the future of the Liverpool empire and the Philharmonic hall and orchestra.

Mr. Luce: I have already replied to the hon. Member's letter of 15 January, and I am happy to meet him.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Diesel Fuel

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the additional annual revenue from equalising the cost of diesel fuel with petrol at the point of sale.

Mr. Brooke: The present instability in the prices of petrol and diesel fuel (derv) makes comparison difficult, but, on the basis of the latest information available, raising the duty on derv to bring its pump price into line with that of petrol is estimated to yield net additional revenue of £45 million in a full year.

VAT

Mr. Stern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to remove the requirement to pay value added tax on transactions between registered traders.

Mr. Brooke: No. The Government believe, in accordance with the clear majority view of a working party consisting of business, professional and Customs and Excise interests, which reported in 1979, that the balance of advantage remains with retaining the present system.

Furs (Illegal Importation)

Mr. Hancock asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions there have been for the illegal importation of furs in each of the last three years.

Mr. Brooke: I am not aware of any such prosecutions under endangered species legislation. Information about prosecutions for smuggling furs on which import charges are due is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his engagements for the afternoon of 13 December, stating on which date each engagement was arranged.

Mr. Lawson: On the afternoon of Friday 13 December 1985 I was on a speaking tour in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. This had been arranged last summer.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motor Vehicles (Incidents)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of casualties arising since 1982 from incidents when the security forces have opened fire on vehicles taken without their owners' consent.

Mr. Scott: The information (which includes casualties inflicted on the security forces by such vehicles, and deaths and injuries of civilians involved in terrorist as well as ordinary crime) is as follows:

Year	*Deaths*		*Casualties*	
	Civilians	*Security Forces*	*Civilians*	*Security Forces*
1983	2	—	3	1
1984	1	—	3	5
1985	2	—	8	5
1986*	—	—	—	—

* As at 22 January.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is his policy that the chairman of the Police Federation of Northern Ireland shall be prevented from representing by means of public statements and interviews with the media the federation's views on matters pertaining to the welfare and efficiency of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Tom King: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audio and Video Tapes

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress towards the introduction of the proposed levy on blank audio and video tapes.

Mr. Pattie: The Government are still considering whether to introduce a levy on blank audio and video tapes. Our conclusions will be announced in a White Paper dealing with copyright law, which is now in the final stages of preparation.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the present state of the negotiations on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

British Leyland

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account he took of the long-term agreement reached between Land Rover and Fiat of Italy for the supply of engines for the Land Rover vehicle when he made his statement to the House on Monday 3 February; and if he will make a further statement in regard to promises given to his Department by General Motors.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the statement he made to the House on Monday 3 February concerning the possible acquisition by General Motors of British Leyland was made without prejudice to any future decision to refer any such takeover to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes. My right hon. Friend would decide whether to make such a reference in the light of the Director General of Fair Trading's advice.

Takeovers (Poison Pill)

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to give statutory effect to the prohibition of the use of poison pill tactics by

companies seeking to defeat an unwelcome takeover bid currently contained in the city code on takeovers and mergers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Some such tactics may already be precluded by law, whilst others are unexceptionable. I am confident that the takeover panel will act against any tactic it judges abusive, and I am similarly prepared to bring forward proposals if I conclude that legislation is necessary. I am not, for the moment, persuaded that it is. But I am keeping the situation under review.

Engagements

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the Secretary of State's engagements for the afternoon of 13 December, stating on which date each engagement was arranged.

Mr. Channon: I am consulting my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond (Mr. Brittan) and I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Incomes

11. **Mrs. Dunwoody** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the aggregate profit in 1985 for livestock farms employing labour.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that aggregate farming income is not collected on a basis which enables it to be split by sector or according to whether labour is employed.

15. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on recent trends in farm incomes.

18. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the recent fall in farm incomes.

Mr. Gummer: The White Paper on the annual review of agriculture presented to Parliament last month showed that farming income in the United Kingdom for 1985 is forecast to fall by 43 per cent. to £1,154 following a 35 per cent. rise in 1984. The decline is of course particularly marked because of the exceptionally poor weather during 1985.

45. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in the light of the drop in agricultural incomes set out in the "Annual Review of Agriculture 1986", Cmnd. 9708, what steps he intends to take to arrest and reverse their decline.

Mrs. Fenner: The drop in farming income during 1985 was mainly due to the bad weather. Weather is one of the risks that the farming industry must expect to face, but because of the exceptionally adverse situation of some livestock producers almost £17 million was made available as special weather aid for those who were worst affected. We will continue our efforts aimed at promoting an efficient and prosperous agriculture within the context of an economical and fair common agricultural policy.

56. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the net income of agriculture in the calendar year 1985 and express that amount as a percentage of the net income of agriculture in the calendar year 1984.

Mrs. Fenner: Table 23 of the White Paper, Annual Review of Agriculture 1986 (Cmnd. 9708) shows various income indicators. Farming income in 1985 is forecast at £1,154 million and represents 57 per cent. of farming income in the previous year. Farm business income—a broader based measure—is forecast at £2,223 million and represents 75 per cent. of farming income in 1984.

Ewes

13. **Sir Paul Hawkins** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the new arrangements for the export of ewes to France.

Mr. Gummer: We are obliged under Community law to implement the European Commission regulation which requires us to charge clawback on ewes and ewemeat exported to other member states. But we shall continue to press our fundamental opposition to the imposition of clawback on animals and meat which have not received variable premium.

23. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made in support of the National Farmers Union's reference to the European Court of France's refusal to import British ewe meat without a clawback.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins).

We are closely in touch with the National Farmers' Union which is still considering the legal position.

Hormones

16. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his reply to the European Economic Community on the issue of hormones.

Mr. Jopling: I voted against the proposal and recorded my view that a ban on the use of the hormones concerned for growth promotion was scientifically unjustified and could in any case only be adopted by unanimity.

Food Additives

17. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is satisfied with the effectiveness of current regulations governing the use of food additives.

Mrs. Fenner: We have a comprehensive range of regulations under the Food Act covering the use of food additives. We keep them under regular review but we are always prepared to consider suggestions for improvements.

31. **Mr. Pike** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from consumer organisations concerning the use of additives in food.

Mrs. Fenner: My Ministry regularly receives a great variety of correspondence on all matters concerning food including the use of additives.

36. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received requesting the listing of additives to individual ingredients in packaged food.

Mrs. Fenner: The Food Labelling Regulations 1984 require that with effect from 1 July 1986 all additives that perform a technological function in the final food must be listed either by category name, or by category name and specific name or approved serial number. This is a requirement of the European Community's food labelling directive (79/112). Statutory consultations were undertaken before the United Kingdom regulations were made.

Field Drainage Design Service.

19. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the charging policy of the field drainage design service.

Mrs. Fenner: Prices for the field drainage design service have been set at levels which the market will support.

Official Secrets Act (Food Standards Committees)

20. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on the implications of the application of the Official Secrets Act to members of committees concerned with food standards.

Mrs. Fenner: A small number of people have wrongly suggested that the Food Advisory Committee operates under a cloak of secrecy in the way it offers advice to Ministers.

41. **Mr. Freud** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why it is his policy to keep confidential material submitted to, and proceedings of, official committees dealing with nutritional matters.

Mrs. Fenner: All the reports of the Food Advisory Committee are published and are thus available to members of the public. Where those reports refer to supporting material, the committee requests the holder of that material also to make it available to inquirers from the public. In some cases it is necessary to respect the commercial confidentiality of certain information.

Planning Applications

21. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column 559, in how many cases relating to planning applications on sites of more than four hectares of agricultural land his Department was consulted in the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mrs. Fenner: Provisional figures for the 1985 calendar year show that there were about 600 consultations in England in respect of all types of non-agricultural development on sites of more than 4 hectares of agricultural land.

Milk Quotas

22. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest estimate for the number of jobs lost on farms, creameries, and dairy plants, as a result of the imposition of milk quotas.

Mr. Gummer: I regret that the information requested is not available.

61. **Mr. Best** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the dairy industry regarding the operation of milk quotas.

Mr. Gummer: I and my officials are in regular contact with a wide range of organisations to discuss various aspects of the milk quota arrangements. We shall continue to seek their views on new developments, such as the proposed Community outgoers' scheme.

Mr. Ashdown asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effect of milk quotas on tenant farmers.

Mr. Gummer: The introduction of milk quotas has led to problems for producers which are in many respects similar for both owner-occupier and tenant. The fact that both tenant and landlord have an interest in the quota allocated to a producer for use on a tenanted holding may, however, give rise to additional issues when the tenancy comes to an end or when the tenant wishes to give up milk production. We are examining these issues and consulting the industry to see if agreement can be reached on solutions which recognise the contribution that both parties have made to the build-up of quota and which ensure the continued effective functioning of the landlord-tenant system.

39. **Mr. Patrick Nicholls** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made to resolve the issue of transferability of milk quotas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As I made clear to my hon. Friend on 21 November, I attach great importance to obtaining better arrangements for the transfer of quota between producers. We are actively considering what might be done for the 1986-87 milk year.

Intervention Stocks

24. **Mr. Torney** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest amounts of surplus United Kingdom cereals placed into intervention; what is the cash value; and what is the cost of storage of these intervention stocks.

48. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current value of cereals held in intervention in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: There are 6 million tonnes of grain in intervention stocks in the United Kingdom, valued at £715·4 million. The average cost of taking grain into store and storing it for one year is about £13 per tonne.

28. **Mr. Clay** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total, by volume and value, of grain currently held in intervention in the United Kingdom; and how this compares with 1985.

Mr. Gummer: There were 6·2 million tonnes of grain in intervention stores in the United Kingdom at the beginning of January, valued at £738·4 million. The stock at the beginning of January 1985 was 3·3 million tonnes, valued at £401·2 million.

53. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much grain was taken into intervention in the United Kingdom during 1985.

Mr. Gummer: Four million tonnes of grain was sold into intervention in the United Kingdom during 1985.

59. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total value of agricultural produce currently held in intervention in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: The value of United Kingdom agricultural produce held in intervention on 31 December 1985 was £1,406 million, calculated on the basis of the buying—in prices applicable at that date.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the 1985 cereal crop was taken into intervention; and how this compares with the average taken in over the last five years.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the United Kingdom's 1985 grain harvest was taken into intervention.

Mr. Gummer: About 10 per cent. of estimated United Kingdom cereals production in 1985 has been sold into intervention in the current marketing year to date. Sales into intervention over the previous five marketing years averaged 7 per cent. of total production.

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service

25. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the budget for the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service for 1986-87 as a percentage of its 1985-86 figure.

33. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what amount the budget for the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service will be reduced in 1986.

Mr. Jopling: The cost of ADAS in cash terms is expected to show very little change in 1986-87 compared with 1985-86.

52. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff will be employed in the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service in 1986; and how this compares with 1985.

Mr. Jopling: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary gave the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 19 December 1985 at column 279.

Pesticides

26. **Mr. Alton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his plans to make the results of toxicity tests on pesticides available to the public.

Mrs. Fenner: We are proposing to make available to the public a full evaluation of each pesticide as soon as it becomes commercially available or undergoes a review under the new arrangements. This document details in every respect the product's toxicity, its wildlife and its environmental effects. We also propose to consider, on a case-by-case basis, requests for access to the study reports themselves, and to grant access where a request is justified in scientific terms. These proposals are set out in detail in the consultative document "Pesticides: Implementing Part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985" which is in the Library.

47. **Dr. Roger Thomas** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to lay the regulations governing the use of pesticides and the procedure for their approval provided for in the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985.

Mrs. Fenner: I hope that I and my colleagues will be able to lay the draft regulations provided for in part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act before the summer recess.

Fishing Industry

27. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress being made to prevent abuses in the fishing industry arising from the use of flags of convenience by other members of the Community.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the measures which my right hon. Friend announced in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on 6 December will be effective in ensuring that the quotas allocated to the United Kingdom are reserved for fishing vessels having a real economic link with this country.

Farm Workers

29. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the average farm worker's earnings at the latest available date; and what they represent as a percentage of national average earnings.

Mrs. Fenner: The average weekly earnings of hired regular whole-time men working in agriculture in England and Wales is estimated at £129·92 for 46·6 hours for the year ended September 1985. This represents over 80 per cent. of the average weekly earnings of equivalent workers in all industries and services in Great Britain as a whole at April 1985.

51. **Miss Maynard** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest figures for the average weekly earnings of farm workers.

58. **Mr. Strang** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the average weekly earnings of agricultural workers in 1985.

Mrs. Fenner: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given today to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

57. **Mr. Evans** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of farmers and growers currently employ workers on a regular basis; and what is the size of this labour force at the latest available date.

Mrs. Fenner: Details of the size and composition of the agricultural labour force in the United Kingdom at June 1985 are given in table 5 of the "Annual Review of Agriculture 1986" White Paper (Cmnd. 9708). Just over 36 per cent. of holdings in England and Wales returned at June 1985 employed regular hired or family agricultural workers.

63. **Mr. Jack Thompson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the average skilled agricultural workers earnings; and how they compare with the average skilled wage in industry.

Mrs. Fenner: No estimate is available of the average earnings of skilled manual workers in all industries and services. Figures for the average weekly earnings of skilled manual workers in agriculture are shown in the table:

Average gross weekly eagnings and hours of full-time skilled men in agriculture 1984-85†*

	Grade I	*Grade II*	*Craftesmen*
Earnings (£)	175·57	151·44	136·40
Hours	47·8	47·1	47·8

* Appointment grades and craftesmen as defined by the Agricultural Wages Board (England and Wales) in the Agricultural Wages Order 1985.

† Figures relate to full-time hired men (aged 20 and over) in England and Wales for the year ended September 1985.

Source: Wages and Employment Enquiry (England and Wales)

65. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate what effect the decline in agricultural incomes has had on the numbers employed in agriculture in East Anglia.

Mrs. Fenner: Estimates of farming income by standard statistical region in 1985 are not available and I am unable to estimate the effect on numbers employed in East Anglia of recent income movements.

Results of the June 1985 agricultural census suggest, however, that the proportional reduction in the numbers of hired and family agricultural workers in East Anglia between 1984 and 1985 was slightly less than the average annual fall over the period 1980 to 1984.

Red Meat

30. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many red meat animals were slaughtered for food in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Gummer: For 1985, the provisional total number of slaughterings for the United Kingdom was 34·75 million, comprising 4·22 million cattle, 15·27 million sheep and 15·26 million pigs.

Outgoers Scheme

32. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in establishing the details of the proposed European Economic Community outgoers scheme.

35. **Mr. Franks** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the negotiations on the proposed European Community outgoers scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The proposal has been discussed several times at official level within the Community. There is general recognition of the need for a reduction in total quotas, but little agreement on the broad shape of the scheme or on the details. The proposal has not yet been considered by the Council of Agriculture Ministers.

46. **Sir John Farr** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many letters he has received in relation to the European Economic Community further milk outgoers scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend and I have received many representations about the proposed Community outgoers scheme from hon. Members, interested organisations and individual farmers.

The proposals are still being discussed at official level and have yet to come before the Council of Ministers. I am however, particularly concerned that any scheme adopted should reflect the interests of all concerned and operate fairly throughout the Community. I am consulting fully with the organisations concerned as the negotiations go forward.

Agriculture (Future Prospects)

34. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a White Paper on the future of agriculture and its position in the rural economy; and if he will make a statement.

40. **Mr. Latham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he proposes to produce a White Paper on future agricultural policy.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a White Paper on the future development of agriculture.

Mr. Jopling: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox).

Freezer Trawlers

37. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many freezer trawlers are currently in receipt of a pressure stock licence.

Mr. Gummer: A total of four freezer trawlers are currently licensed to fish for pressure stocks, three of these on a provisional basis pending the completion of the current review of licensing arrangements for the pelagic fisheries.

COMA Report

38. **Mr. Ryder** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Ministry has taken in implementing the recommendations of the COMA report.

Mrs. Fenner: Draft proposals for legislation on the labelling of foods with their total and saturated fat contents and revised proposals for voluntary full nutritional labelling of food will be circulated for comment shortly.

In addition, certain changes under the beef and sheep variable premium schemes are designed to encourage the production of lean carcases.

Female Agriculture Workers

42. **Ms. Richardson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current hourly rates of pay for part-time female workers in agriculture.

Mrs. Fenner: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on Tuesday 28 January to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies).

River Mersey (Silt)

43. **Mr. Parry** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to make a decision on the application for a pumping licence for silt dredging from the River Mersey.

Mr. Gummer: I have received a number of representations on this matter, in particular from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) and from other hon. Members who represent Liverpool constituencies. I shall reply as soon as possible.

Untreated Milk

44. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will take steps to permit farmhouse sales of untreated milk to paying guests.

Mr. Gummer: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on 30 January, we have looked again at the position of farmhouse caterers under the new untreated milk regulations. We propose to amend the regulations to allow registered dairy farmers to provide untreated milk to farm visitors provided they tell them what they are drinking.

My Department issued consultation documents covering this proposal on 3 February.

Agricultural Land

49. **Sir Dudley Smith** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has of agricultural land lost in the past five years through local authorities granting themselves planning permission.

Mrs. Fenner: I regret that this information is not available.

Common Fisheries Policy

50. **Mr. Allen Adams** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the operation of the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Gummer: As my right hon. Friend made clear during the debate on 16 January the common fisheries policy represents a first-class deal for the United Kingdom and I am satisfied that it is now working increasingly effectively.

Common Agricultural Policy

54. **Mr. Charles Wardle** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy towards current proposals to reform the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jopling: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham).

EC (Beef and Wine)

55. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current rebated price at which beef and wine is made available to the Soviet Union, expressed in pence per pound and pence per litre, respectively, in consequence of European Economic Community export rebates and special rebates approved by the management committee.

Mr. Gummer: Prices at which beef and wine may be sold to the Soviet Union are matters for the traders concerned. Rates of export refund for beef vary according to the category of animal, type of meat, and destination; those applicable at the end of January were published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities (Reference No. L 19 of 25/1/86, page 24) a copy of which is in the Library of the House. For wine, there is a standard rate of export refund valid for nearly all destinations and this was published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities (Reference No. L 22 of 27/1/84, page 23). The export refunds are set in ECU per unit weight or unit volume. 1ECU/tonne converted at the United Kingdom agricultural conversion rate is equal to 0·028062 p/b; 1 ECU/hecto-litre is equal to 0·618655 p/litre.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

62. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which statutory or voluntary bodies he proposes to consult in respect of the designation of environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Jopling: I am already consulting the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council over the selection areas. Their advice is based on extensive consultation with other interested bodies.

Environmental Conservation

64. **Sir Hector Monro** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals the European Commission is investigating as ways of encouraging farming practices which conserve the environment.

Mrs. Fenner: The Commission has undertaken to operate a common framework for encouraging the conservation of the rural environment and the protection of specific sites and to forward the relevant proposals to the Council. We anticipate that these will include direct support for farmers who maintain or introduce agricultural practices compatible with the protection of the environment and the integration of the objectives into environmental policy. A Community financial contribution towards such arrangements may be proposed. No formal proposals are as yet on the table.

Chicken Feed

Mr. Proctor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what encouragement he gives to egg producers to avoid the use of drugs, antibiotics, synthetic additives, and colouring agents in the mash used for chicken feed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Drugs, antibiotics and synthetic additives are only permitted for use in egg production after thorough screening for safety and efficacy as required by the Medicines Act 1968 and the Use of Feedingstuffs Regulations 1982, as amended in 1984.

Animals (Ritual Slaughter)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he now has any plans to introduce legislation to ban the ritual slaughter of animals.

Mrs. Fenner: We are considering carefully the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on religious slaughter. We have sought the views of all interested parties on the council's recommendations and these will be taken fully into account before decisions are taken.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 February 1986

ENERGY

Wind Power Technology (Exhibition)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Energy, if he will arrange for an exhibition relating to wind power technology to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Such an exhibition is being organised by the British Wind Energy Association for display during the week beginning Monday 10 February. My Department is sponsoring it, and I will attend the formal opening.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Attorney-General if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by the Lord Chancellor's Department with grant aid and in the last financial year for which figures are available and the size of the grant so given.

The Attorney-General: In the financial year 1984-85 the following grants were made by the Lord Chancellor's Department to voluntary bodies:

	£
Adamsdown Community Law Centre	64,230
Cambridge House Legal Centre	38,090
Harehills and Chapeltown Law Centre	78,010
Newham Rights Centre	97,620
North Kensington Law Centre	148,650
Saltley Action Centre	58,930
Tower Hamlets Law Centre	115,175
Law Centres Federation	48,155
Bristol Courts Family Conciliation Service	20,000
	668,860

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Attorney-General if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which the Lord Chancellor's Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: No such grants are made by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Attorney-General if he will outline the steps which the Lord Chancellor's Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

The Attorney-General: It is not absolutely clear to which organisations my hon. Friend refers in the question. But the seven law centres which exceptionally receive financial support from the Lord Chancellor's Department are required as a condition of their annual grant to adhere to the Lord Chancellor's guidelines for law centres. These include the requirement that a law centre should refrain from party political activity and should not allow its premises to be used for that purpose.

Legal Aid (Fees)

Mr. Lawrence asked the Attorney-General what negotiations he has had, or is proposing to have, arising from the Coopers and Lybrand report, with the Bar Council over fees in criminal legal aid cases.

The Attorney-General: Officials have discussed the Coopers and Lybrand report with representatives of the Bar Council. The Lord Chancellor will be writing later today to the chairman of the Bar with the Government's response. I have also written to the chairman of the Bar.

PRIME MINISTER

Farm/Tourist Operators (Grants)

Mr. Maclean asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on co-ordination between the Department of Employment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on publicity for the availability of grants for farm/tourist operators.

The Prime Minister: Publicity for grants available under the agriculture improvement scheme for investments in farm tourism is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. His Department is in touch with the Department of Employment and the English and regional tourist boards about the administration of the scheme.

Civil Defence

Mr. Thurnham asked the Prime Minister which Minister has responsibility for the provisions of civil defence telecommunications.

The Prime Minister: The Home Secretary has responsibility for a number of emergency communications arrangements which would support civil defence plans in time of war. As from 1 April 1986, he will also assume responsibility for other emergency communications services that are currently the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Bradford City Football Club

Mr. Lawler asked the Prime Minister when a decision will be made regarding the request by Bradford City football club for financial assistance to enable the Valley Parade ground to be rebuilt.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have been asked to reply.

At the request of Bradford city council I am pleased to be able to make it an additional capital expenditure allocation for 1985-86 of £1·462 million. This will enable the council to make a grant to the Bradford City football club towards the rebuilding of the club's ground at Valley Parade. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's efforts on behalf of the club.

WALES

Nursing Profession

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to meet leaders of the nursing profession in Wales regarding hospital management and nursing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I have no immediate plans to do so, though of course the Department is in frequent touch with leaders of the nursing and other professions associated with the Health Service in Wales on a wide range of topics, and I met the chairmen of all statutory advisory committees earlier this month for example.

I have also discussed these matters with nursing managers and front-line staff during my visits to date to the health authorities in Wales. Our officials have had useful recent contact with the Welsh branch of the RCN specifically on matters related to the introduction of general management to the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to improve consultative procedures for nurses employed in the National Health Service in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: It is a feature of the changes implied by the introduction of general management into the NHS in Wales that lines of nursing and other professional accountability and advice should be made more plain. Health authorities are well aware of their responsibility to ensure proper consultation on appropriate matters with all relevant professional groups.

Cervical Cancer Testing

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many workplace agreements have been signed with employers in Wales concerning cervical cancer testing agreements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: This information is not available centrally. It is for health authorities to decide how best to provide screening facilities, and it is open to them to consider whether it can be provided effectively in the workplace.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights (Vietnam)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the extent of denial of human rights in re-education camps in Vietnam; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 5 February, at column 182.

Many thousands of people have been detained since 1975 in the so-called "re-education" camps in Vietnam, without charge or trial, apparently on an indefinite basis and in contravention of the international covenant on civil and political rights, which Vietnam ratified in 1982. We are deeply disturbed that the detainees have still been neither charged, nor tried nor released, and that they continue to be subjected to harsh treatment.

Less Developed Countries (Interest Rates)

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the impact that the rise in pound sterling interest rates has had on the economies of less developed countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The proportion of debt of less developed countries denominated in pounds sterling is so small that a change in sterling interest rates has relatively little impact.

El Salvador

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government have taken to seek to ensure adherence to the recent United Nations General Assembly resolution on the situation in El Salvador; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No resolution on the situation in El Salvador has been tabled for the next United Nations General Assembly.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Buildings

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what allocation has been made in the current year for building work on voluntary aided and church schools in Oxfordshire; to which schools money was allocated; and what were the criteria for allocations.

Mr. Dunn: Oxfordshire's allocation for grant-aided building works in voluntary schools for 1986-87 is £470,000. This sum covers committed expenditure and is allocated for the current project at the recently established St. Augustine of Canterbury ecumenical school, Oxford. In making allocations for the aided building programme nationally, first priority was given to expenditure committed to projects already under way. This took up about two thirds of the available resources. The remainder was allocated, first, to projects to provide new school places in areas of population growth; second to those related to approved statutory proposals involving the removal of surplus places; and, finally, to a small number of projects which were urgently and unavoidably needed because of serious dilapidation of school buildings.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what response he has made to the representations from Lancashire county council for additional funding for the repair and maintenance programme for school buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has not received any representations from Lancashire county council.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will pay an official visit to Lancashire to discuss with representatives of the local education authority the current repair and maintenance programme for school buildings in both the county and aided sectors and the adequacy of the current level of resources available for it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to pay an official visit to Lancashire in the near

future. The repair and maintenance of school buildings is the responsibility of the local education authority, with the exception of external repairs to school buildings in the aided sector which are the responsibility of the school governors, and on which 85 per cent. grant is available from the Government.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he proposes to receive a delegation of county councillors, officials and hon. Members from Lancashire regarding the school repairs and maintenance programme for the county; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: While my right hon. Friend would be willing to receive a delegation of county councillors, officials and hon. Members, he has not been asked to do so.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide an analysis of those staying on at school after 16 years of age by region.

Mr. Dunn: The number and proportion of pupils aged 16 and 17 years staying on in maintained schools as at January 1985 are given in the table:

Region	*16-year-olds in maintained schools*		*17-year-olds in maintained schools*	
	Number	*Proportion* 'Staying On' per cent.*	*Number*	*Proportion† 'Staying On' per cent.*
North	11,047	23·5	7,449	15·4
Yorkshire and Humberside	19,010	24·8	12,158	15·8
North West	22,371	22·7	15,707	15·6
East Midlands	14,110	23·8	9,376	15·6
West Midlands	18,835	23·0	12,671	15·3
East Anglia	6,579	25·0	3,962	14·8
Greater London	29,667	35·3	15,228	17·4
Other South East	45,301	31·6	28,757	19·5
South West	14,424	23·8	9,606	15·5
England	181,344	26·7	114,914	16·6

* The proportion of 16-year-olds staying on at school expresses the number of 16-year-olds in school in January 1985 as a percentage of the number of 15-year-olds in school one year earlier.

† The proportion of 17-year-olds staying on at school expresses the number of 17-year-olds in school in January 1985 as a percentage of the number of 15-year-olds in school two years earlier.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give on a regional basis a breakdown of destinations of school-leavers of *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18 years of age.

Mr. Dunn: The information is shown in the following table:

England
Leavers from maintained schools: 1983-84

Region	*Age**	*Intended Destination—Percentages*		
		Full-time Further & Higher Education Courses	*Available for Employment†*	*Not Known*
North	15	10·3	77·1	12·6
	16	20·0	63·5	16·6
	17	57·6	32·7	9·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	15	13·1	75·3	11·6
	16	19·8	66·9	13·2
	17	59·1	32·9	8·1
North West	15	19·0	65·7	15·3
	16	21·6	60·2	18·2
	17	59·2	31·1	9·7
East Midlands	15	17·3	69·9	12·9
	16	21·3	56·6	22·0
	17	59·7	32·9	7·5
West Midlands	15	19·5	66·7	13·8
	16	22·5	59·3	18·1
	17	56·9	35·2	7·9
East Anglia	15	21·7	67·7	10·6
	16	29·0	58·5	12·3
	17	48·4	45·7	6·0

Region	Age*	Intended Destination—Percentages: Full-time Further & Higher Education Courses	Available for Employment†	Not Known
Greater London	15	18·1	62·1	19·7
	16	22·4	58·6	18·9
	17	44·6	45·0	10·5
Other South East	15	22·0	65·8	12·2
	16	22·6	67·7	9·6
	17	54·6	38·6	6·8
South West	15	24·4	63·7	11·9
	16	22·2	66·4	11·4
	17	56·7	37·4	5·9
ENGLAND	15	18·7	67·7	13·6
	16	22·2	62·7	15·1
	17	55·2	36·7	8·1

Source: School leavers Sample Survey. Data subject to sampling error.
Notes: *Age at 31 August 1983.
†Including those leavers intending to go into temporary employment pending entry to full-time courses of further and higher education.

Burnley Wood County Primary School

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received any representations regarding the emergency closure of Burnley Wood county primary school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend has not received any representations concerning this school.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he proposes to make any changes to the 1985-86 cash limits for his Department's Votes.

Sir Keith Joseph: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the 1985-86 cash limit for Class X, Vote 5, (Research Councils etc.: Agricultural and Food Research Council) will be increased by £2,385,000 from £50,340,000 to £52,725,000. This is to enable the Agricultural and Food Research Council to meet extra short-term costs arising from the restructuring of the council's work, which will lead to cost savings in future years. The increase will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planning total of public expenditure.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

African Famine

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further assistance he will make available to refugees and victims of the African famine.

Mr. Raison: I have decided to make available a further £3 million for spending in the current financial year. Of this, £1·5 million is being allocated to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; £500,000 to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and £1 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

These sums are additional to the £750,000 I approved last month, of which £500,000 was for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and £250,000 for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health Education

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the last 10 years for which figures are available, the amounts of money paid by his Department, whether directly or indirectly through some other agency, to organisations and bodies working in the field of health education, detailing the organisation and bodies concerned, the amounts they received and the method of payment.

Mr. Needham: A proportion of the funds allocated to health and social services boards is used for health education but it is not possible to identify the amounts involved. The table lists grants to other bodies whose primary role is health education. Payments are made directly to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents in respect of home safety activities in Northern Ireland. The contributions to other organisations are paid through the Department of Health and Social Security.

Financial Year	Health education council	ROSPA*	Family planning association	National rubella council	Total
1975-76	37,516	5,400	3,500	—	46,416
1976-77	44,705	9,150	5,000	—	58,855
1977-78	49,918	11,333	5,000	—	66,251
1978-79	50,948	12,500	5,000	—	68,448
1979-80	105,350	15,500	6,250	—	127,100
1980-81	152,442	17,500	3,300	—	173,242
1981-82	200,147	21,000	3,300	—	224,447
1982-83	250,068	24,500	3,300	—	277,868
1983-84	256,041	25,970	3,300	500	285,811
1984-85	265,045	27,268	3,500	700	296,513

* Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has about the attitude adopted by representatives of the nationalist community and the Roman Catholic Church towards the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr. Tom King: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Her Majesty's Government were aware before signing the Anglo-Irish agreement of the extent to which the Irish Government had engaged in consultation with the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland about the progress of negotiations on the agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *78*]: The Government were aware that there were informal consultations between the SDLP and the Irish Government in the course of the negotiations. The Government were not informed about the substance of such consultations.

Terrorism

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons were detained under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1973 and 1978 in 1985;

(2) what information he has concerning the number of people who were detained in 1985 under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 and who were charged with scheduled offences under the Act, and other Acts, separately;

(3) if he will make a statement concerning the operation of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 in 1985 with regard to the annual total of arrests made under the Act; and how many persons arrested under the Act were detained for the following periods: *(a)* up to 12 hours, *(b)* 12 to 24 hours, *(c)* 24 to 36 hours, *(d)* 36 to 48 hours, *(e)* 48 to 60 hours and *(f)* 60 to 72 hours, indicating those numbers (i) not ultimately charged under the Act and released, (ii) those charged under the Act, (iii) those charged with an offence but not under the Acts, indicating which offences and (iv) those charged under the Act but not initially detained under the Act.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *77*]: In 1985 there were 986 arrests by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and 61 by the members of the armed forces under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978. Some of those arrested by members of the armed forces would be recorded in the Royal Ulster Constabulary figures if they were subsequently handed over to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Of those arrests carried out by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in 784 of the cases the persons concerned were released without charge; in one case a person was subsequently charged with offences under the Act only; in one case a person was charged with offences under the Act and with offences under other legislation; and in 200 other cases persons were charged with offences under other legislation. One hundred and seventy three of the cases involved persons charged with scheduled offences, though details of the offences are not readily available.

Information on persons charged with an offence under the Act after arrest under other provisions and information on the length of time individuals were held under the Act could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

M25 (Safety)

Mr. Macfarlane asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with safety arrangements on the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The safety arrangements on the M25 are in line with the usual provision on motorways. Improvements to the M25 signalling system, by installing "matrix" signs, have been brought forward a year and are due to be completed by the end of 1987. The Department recently published details compiled by the Meteorological Office of fog-prone areas on the M25. We shall be deciding whether to install more fog-detection equipment that would help drivers. We are also reviewing lighting policy on motorways generally, taking economic and environmental considerations into account.

The greatest aid to safety is still careful and considerate driving. I would be happy to consider any specific point which may concern my hon. Friend.

Advanced Driving Instructor Licence

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it a condition of issue of an advanced driving instructor licence that its validity is conditional upon the licensee also holding a valid driving licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The issue of a certificate of registration as an approved driving instructor is already conditional upon the applicant holding a full driving licence and having held it for four out of the last six years; the Registrar has the power to remove anyone from the register if he no longer holds a current licence.

Boeing 747s (Cracks)

Mr. Bevan asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on standards of maintenance in relation to the recent directive from the Federal Aviation Authority following the discovery of cracks in Boeing 747s.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Civil Aviation Authority, which has the statutory responsibility for ensuring the safety of aircraft, informs me that aircraft built to modern standards, such as Boeing 747, ae designed to be tolerant of structural cracking which can occur in service. Inspections are specified initially as a result of manufacturers' testing, but subsequently take account of service experience. The cracking recently discovered on some Boeing 747 aircraft was within the structural capability of the aircraft concerned. However, the CAA informs me that additional inspections are being specified to ensure that any necessary rectification action is taken in good time.

SCOTLAND

Avalanche Forecasting

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the discussions with the relevant bodies to establish a better system of avalanche forecasting in Scotland to produce recommendations.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Crichness (Planting Grant)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what applications have been made to the Forestry Commission for planting grant in respect of land at Crichness in East Lothian; and what decisions have been made on such applications.

Mr. John MacKay: Altogether, the Forestry Commission has received a total of five grant applications for proposed planting at Crichness. The first, for the planting of some 240 hectares, was made in November 1984, but was withdrawn in January 1985 following the sale of the land and before a decision was given. The second application was made by the new owners in January 1985 and covered 508 hectares. This was replaced in February 1985 by one for 212 hectares. Consideration of this revised application was suspended in March 1985 when it was learnt that planting had already commenced on part of the area; no grants were paid in respect of this planting.

A fourth grant application, covering 225 hectares lying outside the area already planted, was submitted in September 1985. The Forestry Commission has since indicated that it would be prepared to approve this application subject to the applicants producing a satisfactory landscaping plan.

The latest application, made in December 1985, is for the proposed planting of 8·4 hectares of broadleaved trees under the broadleaved woodland grant scheme. This is still under consideration.

Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board (Markers)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many of the markers recruited by the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board for 1986 have been markers on *(a)* at least one previous occasion and *(b)* two or more previous occasions;

(2) how many of the markers recruited by the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board for the 1986 examinations are teachers or further education lecturers presently employed *(a)* in Scotland, *(b)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom and *(c)* outside the United Kingdom;

(3) how many of the markers recruited by the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board for the 1986 examinations have a minimum of two years' recent experience of presenting candidates for Scottish Certificate of Education examinations;

(4) what was the cost of advertising for and recruiting Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board markers *(a)* in Scotland, *(b)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and *(c)* outside the United Kingdom for the 1985 examinations; and what are the corresponding estimated costs for the current year;

(5) how many people aged 70 or over have *(a)* applied and *(b)* been accepted as markers for the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board examinations for 1986.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To provide the information requested, the Scottish Examination Board will require to scrutinise the records of some 2,500 markers individually and calculate the actual and likely expenditure incurred on recruitment of markers in 1985 and 1986, respectively. I have asked the chairman of the board to write to the hon. Member when the information is available.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland in what exceptional circumstances markers for the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board will be excused from attendance at markers' meetings for the 1986 examinations.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish Examination Board has informed me that it will consider waiving the normal requirement of compulsory attendance at markers' meetings:

i. where a meeting is to be held on a weekday and serving teachers cannot be given release to attend the meeting by their headteacher;
ii. where a meeting is to be held on a Sunday and the marker is unwilling on grounds of religious principle to attend; and
iii. where the marker has a previous specific and unbreakable commitment on the day fixed for the markers' meeting.

In any event, every marker receives written instructions and, where a marker is unable to attend a meeting, these are supplemented as required.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the usual qualifications of markers recruited by the Scottish Certificate of Education Examinations Board; and what qualifications, and so on, are required of those markers who do not fulfil the normal qualifications.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Scottish Examination Board continues to require all applicants for consideration for appointment as markers to have, either in the subject concerned or in a related subject, three years experience of presentation for the Scottish Certificate of Education or Certificate of Sixth Year Studies or three years examining experience in tertiary education.

Hospital Patients

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will state for each year since 1978 the number of in-patients and out-patients treated in National Health Service hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The table shows the numbers of patients discharged from in-patient treatment and of new out-patients attending consultant clinics in National Health Service hospitals in each year to 30 September.

Year	*Number of patients discharged**	*Number of new out-patients attending consultant clinics*
1978	748,984	1,961,338
1979	735,583	1,960,952
1980	774,246	1,998,853
1981	792,572	2,032,589
1982	763,867	2,020,560
1983†	790,989	2,041,866

* Discharges includes deaths and transfers from one specialty to another within the NHS.

† Information is not yet available from 1984 and 1985.

Nurses

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will state, for each year since 1978, the number of nurses employed in National Health Service hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested, in the form of whole-time equivalents as at 30 September, is set out in the table. The numbers include those who are qualified, in training and unqualified.

Year	*Number of Nurses*
1978	49,449·0
1979	50,801·4
1980	53,251·4
1981	55,708·0
1982	56,353·1
1983	56,675·5
1984	56,336·0
1985	*56,470·1

* Provisional

Scottish Development Agency and Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is considering any alterations to the current treatment of profits accruing through the sale of shares and investments in companies in which the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board, respectively, have existing interests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In planning the public expenditure provision for these bodies, account is taken of the total receipts each expects to receive. These can include those accruing from the realisation of investments, including shares; the amount of which can be either greater or less than their original cost. As provision is both planned and provided on a cash flow basis, the question of profits or losses accruing from individual assets does not arise directly. The question of whether to allow unanticipated excess receipts to increase gross expenditure on activities financed by the grant-in-aid will continue to be considered if, and when, it arises in the light of all the circumstances prevailing at the time.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the profits accruing, respectively, to the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board through the sale of shares and investments in companies in which they have had interests for each of the years since 1980.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information on the performance of each body in respect of their investments is contained in their annual accounts, copies of which are obtainable in the Library.

Profits (losses in brackets) on the disposal of shares in companies are as follows:

£'000

Financial year	*SDA*	*HIDB*
1980-81	171	Nil
1981-82	(13)	11
1982-83	(21)	(57)
1983-84	466	53
1984-85	918	192

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made in reviewing the work of non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: As part of a programme of reviews of the work of all non-departmental public bodies, announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 19 November 1984, at columns 57-58, the following 17 policy reviews and one financial management survey have already been completed:

Policy Reviews
Scottish Valuation Advisory Council
Scottish Agricultural Research Institutes
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council
Scottish Agricultural Development Council
Milk Appeals Tribunal
Scottish Industrial Development Advisory Board
Scottish Economic Council
Central Institutions
Colleges of Education
Children's Panels
Children's Panel Advisory Committees
Registration of Social Work Establishments Appeal Tribunal Panel
Scottish Police College
Scottish Central Fire Brigade Advisory Council
Scottish Records Advisory Council
Lay Observer for Scotland
Horse Race Betting Levy Appeal Tribunal for Scotland

Financial Management Survey
Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland

The following 17 policy reviews and 9 financial management surveys (including 3 combined reviews and surveys) are now in hand:

Policy Reviews
Commission for Local Authority Accounts in Scotland
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board
Scottish Standing Committee on the Calculation of Residual Value of Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs
Red Deer Commission
Hill Farming Advisory Committee for Scotland
Highlands and Islands Development Consultative Council
Scottish Special Housing Association
Consultative Committee on the Curriculum
Scottish Examination Board
Working Party on Management Training for Leisure and Recreation
Newbattle Abbey College
Scottish Community Education Council
Scottish National Camps Association
General Teaching Council for Scotland
National Committee for In-Service Training of Teachers
Scottish National War Memorial
Scottish Development Agency

Financial Management Surveys
Colleges of Agriculture
Scottish Development Agency
Scottish Tourist Board
New Town Development Corporations
Scottish Examination Board
Scottish Vocational Educational Council
Scottish Council for Research in Education

Newbattle Abbey College
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in Scotland

Next financial year: 32 policy reviews and 10 financial management surveys will be carried out:

Policy Reviews
Central Advisory Committee of JPs
JP Advisory Committees
Scottish Agricultural Consultative Panel
Scottish Agricultural Statistics—Consultative Committee
Committee of Investigation for Scotland
Consumers Committee for Scotland
Consultative Committee on Freshwater Fisheries
Dumping at Sea Act Representations Panel
Secretary of State's Advisory Panel of Economic Consultants
Highlands & Islands Development Board
Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland
Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
Building Standards Advisory Committee
Historic Buildings Council for Scotland
Countryside Commission for Scotland
Orkney Islands Shipping Co Ltd
Scottish Council for Educational Technology
Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council
Scottish Studentship Selection Committee
National Galleries of Scotland
Advisory Committee on Statistical Information
Police (Scotland) Examination Board
Fire Services Examination Board
Boundary Commission for Scotland.
Extra Parliamentary Panel
National Panel of Specialists
Scottish Council for Post Graduate Medical Education
National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting
Scottish Advisory Committee on Top Grade Scientific Posts
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust
Scottish Health Service Planning Council
Scottish Health Education Co-ordinating Committee

Financial Management Surveys
Agricultural Research Institutes
Electricity Consultative Councils
Highlands and Islands Development Board
Scottish Special Housing Association
Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee
Countryside Commission for Scotland
Orkney Islands Shipping Company
National Galleries of Scotland
Scottish National Camps Association
Colleges of Education

This review programme is designed to ensure that the work of these bodies continues to represent good value for money.

Boards of Governors

Mr. Maxton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland to whom chairmen of boards of governors of colleges of education in Scotland are responsible for the actions taken by them.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *233*]: Regulation 4 of the Teachers (Colleges of Education) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 provides for the constitution of a governing body for each college of education; and regulation 11(3) of those regulations contains provision for each such governing body to elect a chairman. The chairman is responsible to the governing body as a whole, subject to any delegated authority which that governing body may have granted to him.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the level of income in current prices and expressed as a percentage of average earnings at which single people, married couples (both working) and married couples with two children pay less income tax and national insurance contributions than they did in 1978-79.

Mr. Moore: The table shows the ranges of earnings within which income tax plus national insurance contributions form a smaller proportion of gross earnings in 1985-86 than in 1978-79, assuming that earnings have risen in line with the national average.

At all income levels those whose earnings have risen in line with the national average have seen a real increase in their take home pay since 1978-79.

Ranges of earnings in 1985-86 where income tax and NIC† form a smaller proportion of gross earnings in 1985-86 than in 1978-79*
(£ per week and percentage average earnings)

	Up to £	*Percentage*	*Above £*	*Percentage*
Single	55·00	28	475	240
Married couple both working‡ no children	138·65	‖42	810	‖245
Married couple husband only working two children under 11	89·00	45	512	260

*Less child benefit, where appropriate.
†Assuming post-October 1985 rates of NIC for contracted-in employees.
‡On the assumption that husband and wife each have the same mulitiple of the appropriate all occupations figure for average earnings (full time males and females respectively).
‖Percentage of joint income.

London Financial Markets

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any guarantees involving the contingent commitment of public funds have been extended on the rescue of *(a)* members of the London gold market other that Johnson Matthey and *(b)* members of any other London financial market.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No guarantee relying on funds provided by Parliament was extended in the rescue of Johnson Matthey Bankers Ltd., nor at the present time is there any liability on the taxpayer under such a guarantee to rescue any other member of the London gold market or any member of any of the London financial markets.

Concessionary Travel Warrants

Mr. Wallace asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of exempting from tax the concessionary travel warrants given to officers of the Northern Constabulary posted to Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles.

Mr. Moore: I regret that a precise estimate is not possible, but the revenue cost is unlikely to exceed £40,000 per annum.

Public Sector Bodies

Mr. Kennedy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards the treatment and destination of profits accruing to public sector bodies from the sale of part or all of their shares in companies in which they have invested; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The treatment of disposal receipts of public sector bodies able to hold shares will vary according to the nature and scale of the holding concerned and the framework of their accounting arrangements. Such receipts would generally be taken into account in determining the public sector resources available to the body in question.

Oil Revenues

Mr. Wallace asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of gross national product is represented by oil revenues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The value of total sales of North sea oil and gas, net of costs, is estimated to have been 5 to 6 per cent. of our gross national product in 1985.

Civil Service Unions (Political Funds)

Mrs. Currie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the effect the proposals by certain Civil Service unions to set up political funds will have on the relationship between the Government and the Civil Service.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made earlier today.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Appeals

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each of the years 1983, 1984, and 1985 those planning applications in which he overturned the recommendation of an inspector following a public inquiry; for each application what is the title and nature of the application, the name of the applicant, the inspector's recommendation and Secretary of State's decision; and if he will give a brief reason for his decision in each case.

Mr. Tracey: Some of this information, particularly in relation to section 36 appeals in 1983, cannot be provided without disproportionate cost. I shall write to the hon. Member with such information as is readily available.

Dog Licences

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many authorities have authorised voluntary agencies to issue dog licences under section 134 of the Post Office Act 1969; what steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to do so; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Local authorities are responsible, under section 134 of the Post Office Act 1969, for the issue of dog licences. I am not aware that any authority has chosen to employ a voluntary agency as its agent for this purpose. I see no need to seek to influence local authorities' judgment in this matter.

Gravesend Town Centre

Mr. John Fraser asked the Sectetary of State for the Environment if he will call in for his consideration the proposal by Gravesham district council to give planning consent for the use of the town centre swimming pool and public open space to private developers.

Mr. Tracey: I am informed that there are at present no formal planning proposals before Gravesham borough council for the use of this site. If such proposals are forthcoming and are referred to my right hon. Friend, he will consider whether to intervene.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what, in real terms, was the housing investment programme allocation to the Cherwell district council for the last five years.

Sir George Young: The housing investment programme allocations to the Cherwell district council for the five financial years from 1982-83 to 1986-87 at 1985-86 prices were:

	£m
1982-83	2·239
1983-84	2·58
1984-85	2·726
1985-86	2·411
1986-87	2·082

The authority's share of the total HIP allocation in the south-east has risen in each of the years in question, from 1·13 per cent in 1982-83 to 1·48 per cent in 1986-87. Since 1981-82 local authorities have been able to supplement their HIP allocations by spending the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the housing invesment programme allocation paid or payable to the London borough of Waltham Forest in each year from 1979-80 to 1986-87 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms expressed in 1979-80 prices.

Sir George Young: The allocations were as follows:

Year	*Cash Terms (£ million)*	*Real Terms (£ million, 1979-80 prices)*
1979-80	17·046	17·046
1980-81	12·892	10·854
1981-82	9·225	7·054
1982-83	9·082	6·488
1983-84	8·627	5·900

Year	Cash Terms (£ million)	Real Terms (£ million, 1979-80 prices)
1984-85	8·945	5·853
1985-86	8·684	5·412
1986-87	7·716	4·601

Since 1981-82 authorities have been able to augment their allocations by use of prescribed proportions of capital receipts. Additional allocations may be made for 1985-86 and 1986-87.

Rugby Football Union

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it a condition of any future grant to the Sports Council that it does not give any money to the Rugby Football Union while that body persists in laying down rules and conditions incompatible with the concept of a free gangway for British Amateur Rugby League Association players and Rugby Football Union players.

Mr. Tracey: No.

Thermal Insulation Values

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the context of Energy Efficiency Year, he will review the thermal insulation values within the building regulations.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) on 16 December 1985 to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), at column *13*.

Greater London Training Board

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the future of the Greater London training board.

Mr. Tracey: None. This is a matter for successor authorities.

Capital Expenditure Grants

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of grant based on debt charges and allocation given for capital expenditure for Hyndburn, Burnley and Blackburn local authorities for *(a)* the urban programme, *(b)* the urban development grant, *(c)* the derelict land grant and *(d)* the European regional development fund for 1984-85; and what is the estimate for 1985-86 for each of these buildings.

Sir George Young: Figures are as follows:

Urban programme

	Capital allocation		Grant paid		Debt charges claimed	
	1984-85 £000s	1985-86 £000s	1984-85 £000s	1985-86 £000s	1984-85 £000s	1985-86 £000s
Blackburn	3,199	3,222	302	385	403	570
Burnley	381	742	49	38	65	50
Hyndburn	209	50	68	62	90	93

Urban development grant

There were no approvals, or grant paid, in 1984-85. Burnley had no approvals, or grant paid, in 1985-86. Blackburn had approvals for £1·9 million of urban development grant in 1985-86, but has claimed no grant as yet. Hyndburn had approvals for £1·8 million of urban development grant, and has claimed £1,600 in grant so far.

Derelict land grant

	Allocation		Grant*	
	1984-85 £000s	1985-86 £000s	1984-85 £000s	1985-86 £000s
Blackburn	250	1,005	119	732
Burnley	180	188	75	142
Hyndburn	73	80	40	172

* 100 per cent. on capital basis.

European regional development fund

	ERDF grant awarded*	
	1984 £000s	1985 £000s
Blackburn	206	506
Burnley	—	198
Hyndburn	—	109

* Calendar years.

Cathedrals

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give full details of the listed building status, together with dates of listing, of all the cathedrals of the Church of England.

Mr. Tracey: I shall answer this question shortly.

Sports (Tobacco Agreement)

Mr. Macfarlane asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is satisfied about the working of the voluntary tobacco agreement between the governing bodies of sport and the tobacco companies; whether he has sought the advice of the Sports Council on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I am satisfied that a voluntary agreement provides the best way of securing that the promotional activities of tobacco companies conform with the overall Government policy and in particular with the voluntary agreement on advertising. I have sought the advice of the Sports Council and other interested bodies on the working of the present agreement. Any alterations sought to the agreement will be decided in the light of comments which I receive and amendments to the voluntary agreement on advertising, which are currently under discussion between the companies and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Merseyside (Voluntary Organisations)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 19 November 1985, *Official Report*, column 148, what further representations have been received from relevant local authorities on the future of county funded voluntary organisations on Merseyside following abolition of the county councils, in the light of his Department's letter to them indicating in more detail how the transitional grants will be allocated; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Merseyside co-ordinating committee of local authority representatives has met my

noble Friend the Minister of State to press its view that transitional grant should be made available to help local authorities on Merseyside support voluntary bodies operating countywide. These views have been supported by letters from individual authorities.

The transitional grant scheme is designed to help individual authorities take on support for voluntary bodies operating primarily on a local basis whose funding is affected by abolition. Countywide voluntary bodies can look to all the authorities in an abolition area for funding, and authorities can contribute either through a collective grant-giving scheme, or on an individual basis. The RSG settlement has ensured that successor authorities have access to all the resources the county would have had, and we have no proposals to treat Merseyside authorities on a more favourable basis than authorities elsewhere in the country.

Bradford City Football Club

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the reply of 21 January, *Official Report*, column 143, when he expects to be in a position to announce what financial assistance her Majesty's Government intend to give to Bradford City football club to help rebuild its ground at Valley Parade.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend to his hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler).

Government Expenditure

Mr. Straw asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* tables showing net rates as a percentage of income assuming the operation of rebates as at present and on a basis comparable with the tables at figures 9 page 20 and figure 11 page 25 of Cmnd. 9714.

Mr. Waldegrave [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. 26]: The information requested is set out in the table, together with figures for the proposed community charge calculated on the same basis. The figures show that with the present rebates system as well as the new rebates system on which the Cmnd. 9714 illustrations are based the lowest income households would, on average, pay less in local taxes under a community charge.

Relationship of net rates and net community charge to net household income with present rebate scheme—(Great Britain 1984-85 prices)

Range of net household income (£pw)	*Net local tax bills as a percentage in each range*	
	(1) Net rates	*(2) Net community charge*
Under 50	1·0	0·7
50-75	2·3	1·8
75-100	3·1	2·7
100-150	3·6	3·5
150-200	3·2	3·2
200-250	2·8	2·8
250-300	2·5	2·6
300-350	2·4	2·4
350-400	2·3	2·2
400-500	2·2	2·0
500+	1·9	1·5
All households	2·8	2·8

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shipbuilding

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the means by which his Department secures its objectives of supporting British shipbuilding; how he is monitoring their implementation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Financial support for merchant shipbuilding is available through the intervention fund. British Shipbuilders also receives public dividend capital. The performance of British Shipbuilders is carefully monitored against its annual corporate plan. As sponsors, my Department both monitors and supports the industry as a whole.

Telephone Exchanges

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many system X telephone exchanges have been sold overseas by Plessey and the General Electric Company as a result of assistance from his Department.

Mr. Butcher: Orders outside the United Kingdom for system X have been won in St. Vincent, Jersey and Guernsey. In each case the business was won on the competitive merits of the system and its suppliers.

Motor Industry (Components)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage Ford, Vauxhall and Peugeot Talbot to increase their use in the United Kingdom and elsewhere of United Kingdom-made components.

Mr. Butcher: Departmental Ministers and officials are in regular touch with the senior management of Ford, Peugeot Talbot and Vauxhall and every opportunity is taken to emphasise the need for the companies to give full and fair access to United Kingdom component manufacters. I am optimistic about the way matters are developing.

Ford, of course, is itself an important manufacturer of components in the United Kingdom for use both here and overseas. Its United Kingdom vehicles already have a United Kingdom content of around 80 per cent.

Peugeot Talbot has recently launched the Ryton-built Peugeot 309 with an initial level of United Kingdom content of 65 per cent. Talks will commence shortly between the company and my officials to explore ways in which more United Kingdom components might be incorporated in PSA group models built here and overseas.

As far as Vauxhall are concerned, General Motors Passenger Cars (Europe) set up a high level task force last year to look at the imbalance between what it builds in the United Kingdom and what it sells here. Vauxhall has now undertaken to increase United Kingdom production and increase United Kingdom component sourcing which should mean that by the end of 1986, some 64 per cent. of Vauxhall cars sold here will be built here with a United Kingdom content of 60 per cent. Talks between my Department and the task force are continuing with the aim of securing further improvements and further opportunities for United Kingdom component manufacturers.

Director of Information

Mr. Williams asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will detail the functions of his Director of Information.

Mr. Butcher: The Director of Information is responsible for advice on, and overall supervision of, the presentation of departmental policies, activities and services through the news media and through paid publicity; for the management of the Department's weekly business magazine, *British Business*, and its monthly staff newspaper, *DTI News;* and the management of the Department's general inquiry point.

Rolls-Royce Ltd.

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce details of the privatisation of Rolls-Royce Ltd.

Mr. Pattie: I am not yet in a position to add to my reply of 8 November to my hon. Friend. I shall make a further announcement in due course.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the chairman of the Post Office concerning the future of benefit payments at post offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The payment of social security benefits forms a substantial proportion of the work of the counters business and the future level of such traffic is therefore covered in my department's periodic discussions with the Post Office about future plans for the business.

Post Office Corporation

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to prepare the Post Office Corporation for privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Post Office is not excluded from our policy to transfer activities from the public to the private sector wherever it is practicable and commercially sensible to do so. We have not decided whether the corporation might be privatised and we therefore have no plans at present to prepare it for privatisation.

British Leyland

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account he took of the long-term agreement reached between Land Rover and Fiat of Italy for the supply of engines for the Land Rover vehicle when he made his statement to the House on Monday 3 February; and if he will make a further statement in regard to promises given to his Department by General Motors.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *252*]: I am told by Land Rover Ltd. that it does not have agreements with Fiat of Italy.

Were a deal with GM to be reached in relation to Leyland Trucks, Land Rover, Freight Rover and certain related overseas operations, it would be willing to give full undertakings that the majority of products sold by the businesses involved would be manufactured in the United Kingdom; that the products would continue to have a high local content; that there would be a substantial level of exports; that research and development facilities will be maintained and developed in the United Kingdom; that Land Rover will retain its distinct British identity; and that appropriate level of investment will be injected into the business to achieve competitive future models and facilities.

Multi-Fibre Arrangement

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the present state of the negotiations on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: [*pursuant to his reply* 6 February 1986, c. *251*]: Discussions are in progress in the Community on a mandate for the negotiations on the renewal of the MFA. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently met the industry and other interested parties. I intend to keep closely in touch with interested parties in the United Kingdom on this.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Bed Sores (Treatment)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated cost of the treatment of a patient with bed sores in a National Health Service hospital.

Mr. Whitney: The information is not available.

Meningitis

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the number of medical practitioners whose conduct in respect of the diagnosis of meningitis has been found unsatisfactory by family practitioner service committees in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that this information is not available.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown of the losers from the £450 million cut in housing benefit under the Social Security Bill, by category of claimant and by numbers losing less than £1 per week, £1 to £2, £2 to £3, £3 to £4, £4 to £5, £5 to £6, £6 to £7, and more than £7 per week.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the total number of claimants of housing benefit at his Department's offices at Highgate and Finsbury Park for each year since the scheme was introduced.

Mr. Major: Housing benefit is administered by local authorities and it is therefore not possible to relate the case load to this Department's local offices. Tables showing each local authority's estimate of its rent rebate, rent allowance and rate rebate case load, for each year since

the introduction of housing benefit, were placed in the Library last July following a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) on 19 July 1985, at column *305*.

Prescriptions

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the present cost to his Department of the administrative processing of a prescription.

Mr. Hayhoe: The administrative cost of the Prescription Pricing Authority in 1984-85 was 4·62p per prescription.

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the percentage of prescriptions for prescription-only medicines which have a content value of less than £2.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that the information required can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Death Grant

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the total number of claimants of funeral grant for each year since 1979 at the Highgate and Finsbury Park offices of his Department.

Mr. Major: The information relating to the number of claims to death grant received in the years from April 1980 to date is as follows; figures for the year commencing April 1979 are no longer available:

	Highgate	*Finsbury Park*
1980-81	1,327	947
1981-82	938	882
1982-83	1,256	1,108
1983-84	1,109	1,028
1984-85	1,116	883
1985-86*	1,311	716

* To 14 January 1986.

Stanley Royd Hospital

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about the circumstances surrounding the recent failure of a private contractor to fulfil a contract to supply clean laundry at the Stanley Royd hospital in Wakefield; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I have no such information. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Wakefield health authority.

Benefits (Payment)

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he is having with the banks about the Government's response to the recommendations of the 20th report of the Public Accounts Committee about switching benefit payments from post offices to banks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: No such discussions are currently taking place. The position remains as described in the Government response to the Public Accounts Committee's report.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his reply on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *746*, he will publish a similar table showing the total weekly pensions on the assumption that the additional 2 per cent. contribution to personal and occupational pension schemes ceases after the first five years.

Mr. Newton: Tables P1 to P6 in the technical annex to the White Paper were all prepared on the basis sought. The 2 per cent. incentive addition to the rebate has not been assumed to continue beyond 1992-93. This point is explained in paragraph 1.9 on page 2 of the technical annex.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to his reply on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *746*, he will publish a similar table showing the rate of income support for a single person, assuming annual increases in the income support rate in line with average earnings and annual increases of earnings of 1·5 per cent. in real terms *(a)* including the premium for a person aged over 80 years and disabled and *(b)* excluding that premium.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what assumption was made in table P1 of the technical annex to "Reform of Social Security" as to the proportion of the payments made to personal and occupational pension schemes that would be used to defray adminstrative expenses, to pay commission, or in any other way not resulting in the provision of benefit for or in respect of members of those schemes.

Mr. Newton: Administrative and all other charges are assumed to account for 10 per cent. and 7 per cent. respectively of contributions to personal pensions and occupational money-purchase schemes, as indicated in paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7 of the techincal annex. These assumptions were made for illustrative purposes only and are not intended as firm indications of the Government's intentions.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* details of the waiting lists for hospital treatment for each district health authority in the north-west region.

Mr. Whitney: The requested information is given in the "Hospital In-Patient Waiting List at 31 March 1985, England, District Summaries", a copy of which is in the Library.

Hospital Closures (Burnley)

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received any representations regarding the proposed closure of Bank hall and Marsden hospitals in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: No representations have been received. I understand Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority is about to consult locally on the Bank hall and Marsden hospitals. The hon. Member may therefore wish to address his inquiries to the chairman of the authority.

Nurses

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has about shortages of trained nurses in hospitals for the mentally sick and handicapped; and if he will give figures on a regional basis.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that detailed information of this nature is not collected centrally. However, a survey for the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives and Health Visitors showed that at 31 March 1984 in England 3 per cent. of all whole-time equivalent funded posts for mental illness and 4·6 per cent. for mental handicap nursing staff remained vacant for at least three months, compared with the average of 2·5 per cent. of all nursing and midwifery staff.

The information for March 1985 is still being validated.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bellingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any changes will be made to the cash-limited Votes for his Department.

Mr. Newton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for Class XII, Vote 5, will be increased by £9,241,000 from £762,393,000 to £771,634,000. The increase reflects the costs of additional staff partly offset by savings on other items of expenditure.

Taking account also of costs which fall on the national insurance fund, the overall increase in public expenditure will be £14,161,000, which will be charged to the Reserve and so will not add to the planning total of public expenditure.

Community Pharmacies

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to introduce legislation providing powers to bring in the new contract for National Health Service community pharmacies.

Mr. Hayhoe: In my reply to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) on 14 November 1985, at column *289*, I confirmed the Government's commitment to the contract for National Health Service community pharmacists negotiated and agreed with their representatives last summer. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services announced that the Government will introduce a Bill in the present Session to remove Crown immunity and make the Health Service subject to the provisions of the Food Act. This Bill will also propose the provision of powers to introduce, in full, the new pharmacists' contract; and, to re-establish beyond doubt the Government's ability, challenged in court proceedings last autumn, to ensure that the remuneration and reimbursement arrangements for all NHS family practitioner services professional contractors are fair to the contractors themselves and to the taxpayer by allowing past overpayments or underpayments to be reflected in future fees. There provisions will cover Great Britain and, if necessary, be extendable to Northern Ireland.

Hip Operations

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the modal average interval between the date a patient is placed on the waiting list and the date of admission to a National Health Service hospital for a total hip replacement or other arthroplasty of the hip in England for the last year for which figures are available and what were the longest and shortest waits respectively.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 January 1986, c. *133-34*]: The estimated modal average interval between the date a patient was placed on the waiting list and the date of admission to a National Health Service non-psychiatric hospital for total hip replacement or other arthroplasty of the hip in England in 1983, the latest year for which figures are available centrally, was between eight and nine weeks. As information is held centrally on a sample basis, it is not possible to ascertain maximum and minimum waiting times precisely but in 1983 about 2 per cent. of the recorded waiting times in the sample were three years or more and about 2 per cent. were less than two weeks.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people qualify for supplementary benefit additions for *(a)* domestic help, *(b)* heating, *(c)* disabled persons heating, *(d)* diet, *(e)* laundry, *(f)* special clothing, *(g)* attendance costs, *(h)* bathing needs and *(i)* blindness; and how many people qualify for (i) all of these, (ii) seven to eight of these, (iii) four to six of these, (iv) two in three of these and (v) one of these.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 January 1986, c. *234*]: Estimated numbers at December 1983, the latest date for which information is available, are as follows:

	Number of claimants with additions (thousands)
(a) Domestic assistance	2
(b) Heating (excluding item *(c)*)	2,471
(c) Disabled person's heating*	116
(d) Diet	429
(e) Laundry	121
(f) Special clothing†	22
(g) Attendance needs	Less than 500
(h) Baths	13
(i) Blindness	36
(i) In receipt of all the above additions	None
(ii) In receipt of seven to eight	None
(iii) In receipt of four to six	6
(iv) In receipt of two to three	460
(v) In receipt of one only	2,206

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry.

* Payable under paragraph 7 of Schedule 4 to the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements) Regulations 1983 (SI 1983 No. 1399).

† Includes additions for heavy wear and tear on clothing due to disability and non-standard size clothing and footwear.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Creation

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General (1) what are the original sources (with approximate dates) from which the estimates of percentage impact on unemployment, shown in table 3.7.13 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1986-87 to 1988-89," Cmnd. 9702-II, are derived for each of the following employment measures: the community programme, community industry, the job release scheme, the job splitting scheme and the young workers' scheme;

(2) what are the sources (with approximate dates) from which the estimates of the percentage impact on unemployment, contained in the special employment and training press notice, are derived for each of the following measures: the enterprise allowance scheme, the YTS and training in industry.

Mr. Lang: Relevant information is derived from ongoing internal monitoring of the measures and from sample surveys conducted by external consultants. Copies of their reports are placed in the Library as soon as is practicable.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General what is the percentage impact on unemployment of the enterprise allowance sheme, the YTS and training in industry assumed by his Department for the purposes of the estimated direct effect of the special employment and training measures shown in its monthly unemployment and vacancies and special employment and training measures press notice.

Mr. Lang: 69 per cent. in December. This depends on a number of uncertain assumptions and is a best estimate of the direct effects only.

Ms. Clare Short asked the Paymaster General when the estimate contained in the special employment and training press notice of the percentage impact on unemployment was last revised; and what was the reason for, and the effect of, the revision for each of the following measures: the community programme, community industry, the job release scheme, the job splitting scheme, the young workers' scheme, YTS, training in industry and the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Lang: The estimate of the impact on unemployment of the measures covered in the special employment and training measures press notice usually changes each month as coverage of each individual measure changes or if any assumptions are changed. Measures without changed coverage over the past two months were community industry, training in industry and the job splitting scheme.

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. Maclean asked the Paymaster General if he has any plans to review the method by which travel-to-work areas are determined; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The travel-to-work areas, and the methods used in deriving them, were reviewed in 1984 using the data on the pattern of journeys to work provided by the 1981 census of population. The definitions of the revised areas were published, together with a description of the methodology, in a supplement to the September 1984 edition of *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library. Only censuses of population provide sufficiently detailed and comprehensive data on travel patterns to form the basis of a review of travel-to-work areas. The next review is therefore scheduled to be undertaken when the results of the 1991 census are available.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Paymaster General how many people were employed in the dairy industry in November 1984 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Lang: In November 1984 there were an estimated 41,800 employees in employment in the milk and milk products industry (activity heading 4130 of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification) in Great Britain. The corresponding figure for November 1983 was 42,500.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will provide an analysis in percentage terms and overall numbers of those entering YTS programmes: *(a)* at 16 and *(b)* at 17 years of age by region.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is given in the table.

Entrants to YTS from 1 April to 31 December 1985

	16 years at date of entry	*Per cent. of total*	*17 years at date of entry*		*Total entrants**
Scotland	30,021	89	3,794	11	33,853
Northern	24,490	95	1,133	4	25,666
North West	55,572	95	2,892	5	58,582
Yorkshire & Humberside	35,931	92	2,953	8	39,108
Midlands	73,784	93	5,581		79551
Wales	19,935	91	1,844	8	21,817
South West	26,208	94	1,684		28,013
South East	51,320	92	4,216	8	55,712
London	17,763	85	2,978	14	20,881
Great Britain	335,024	92	27,075	7·5	363,183

* The figures in this column include entrants in special groups who entered YTS at 18 years of age or older.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General (1) if he will provide an analysis of destinations of YTS leavers by region, in overall number and percentage terms;

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of regional differences of destinations (unemployment, employment, further education, and so on) from the Manpower Services Commission 100 per cent. survey of YTS leavers.

Mr. Lang: A regional breakdown of survey results covering young people who left YTS during the period April to July 1985 is given in the following table:

All figures expressed as percentages

Region	*Question-naires issued*	*Replies*	*In a full-time job*			*In a part-time job*	*Unem-ployed*	*On another YTS scheme*	*On a full-time course*	*Doing some-thing else*	*Average un-employment rate April-July 1985*
			All	*Same employer*	*Different employer*						
Scotland	11,559	6,726	49·8	26·3	23·6	3·4	33·8	4·9	2·6	5·4	15·5
Northern	8,981	5·966	42·0	20·3	21·6	5·2	41·5	4·1	1·7	5·6	19·9
North West	21,634	12,415	53·8	28·0	25·8	4·1	27·9	5·1	2·3	6·8	15·9
Yorkshire and Humberside	13,461	8,516	54·0	29·7	24·3	4·8	30·6	3·5	1·5	5·6	14·9
Midlands	29,506	18,052	58·5	32·8	25·7	4·1	23·9	4·3	2·4	6·8	14·2
Wales	6,633	3,823	44·6	20·5	24·0	4·7	36·3	4·8	1·9	7·6	16·6
South West	9,797	5,980	66·1	39·2	26·9	4·0	18·1	3·0	2·9	5·9	11·6
South East	18,891	11,248	70·7	38·8	31·9	3·8	15·3	2·5	2·4	5·3	9·4
London	6,122	3,028	63·5	33·1	30·4	2·6	22·3	2·4	3·3	5·8	10·4
Great Britain	126,584	75,754	57·1	30·9	26·2	4·1	26·4	4·0	2·3	6·1	13·2

Notes:

i) Follow-up results are liable to seasonal fluctuations. The April to July period may not be representative of the results for a full year.

ii) Leaver results should be considered alongside regional unemployment rates to put them into proper context.

Start-up Grants

Mr. Madden asked the Paymaster General what is the availability of start-up grants, related to the enterprise programme, in Bradford and in West Yorkshire generally; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: For 1985-86 there are 1,372 places available on the enterprise allowance scheme in West Yorkshire, which includes Bradford. At 31 December 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, 964 people had joined the scheme in that area. No separate figures are available for Bradford.

SOLICITOR GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Drug Abuse

Mr. David Marshall asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will take steps to prosecute shopkeepers who sell kits which can be used for drug abuse, and in particular for cocaine snorting.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The exposure for sale or selling of kits which can be used for drug abuse is a practice to be deplored. It is not, however, possible to say in general terms that such activity is necessarily one in respect of which criminal proceedings can or will be taken. Each such case which is drawn to the attention of the criminal authorities will be closely investigated with a view to possible prosecution. In certain circumstances even in the absence of the possession of controlled drugs or an intent to supply such drugs there could be a contravention of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, including section 19.

Miners' Dispute

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will list for the duration of the miners' dispute (a) the number of people arrested and charged with an offence; (b) the number of people convicted; and (c) the number of people acquitted, stating in each case the nature of the offence.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland [*pursuant to his reply* 3 December 1985, c. *168*]: During the course of the miners' dispute 1,504 persons were arrested, 1,026 persons were prosecuted, 720 persons were convicted and 304 persons were acquitted in respect of offences arising out of the miners' strike. The figure for the number of persons acquitted includes 14 persons whose convictions were quashed on appeal. As a result of the failure of two persons to appear for trial, there are two cases still outstanding. Information on the nature and number of the charges involved is set out in the following table. A large number of the persons brought to trial faced two or more charges.

My reply on 4 April 1985, at columns *718-19*, should be revised to show 4 convictions for possession of an offensive weapon and 3 convictions for theft and as at 22 March 1985 no acquittals.

Nature of Charge	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Acquittals*
Breach of the Peace	834	615	217
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 Section 41	336	246	90
Bail etc (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 3	64	60	4
Vandalism and Malicious Mischief	44	31	13
Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875	24	16	8
Assault	19	14	5
Possession of an Offensive Weapon	10	4	6
Theft	4	3	1
Explosive Substances Act 1883 Section 2	2	0	2
Reckless Conduct	2	2	0
Careless Driving	2	1	1
Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 Section 47	1	1	0

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will list for each region of Scotland his most recent information on the number of arrests, cases where proceedings have been instituted and convictions arising from the miners' strike; and if he will list the offences for which persons have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland [*pursuant to his reply,* 3 December 1985, c. *168*]: The information is set out in the following tables.

The first table details for each local authority region in Scotland the number of persons arrested; the number of persons prosecuted and the number of persons convicted in respect of offences arising out of the miners's strike. The figure for the number of persons convicted does not include 14 persons whose convictions were quashed on appeal. As a result of the failure of two persons to appear for trial, there are two cases still outstanding.

The remaining tables set out for each Scottish local authority region involved, the nature and number of charges brought by procurators fiscal in respect of such offences and the nature and number of such charges which resulted in conviction. A large number of the persons brought to trial faced two or more charges.

My reply on 4 April 1985, at columns 718-9, should be revised to show four convictions for possession of an offensive weapon and three convictions for theft and, as at 22 March 1985, no acquittals.

Local Authority Region	*Number of persons arrested*	*Number of persons prosecuted*	*Number of persons convicted*
Dumfries and Galloway	3	2	2
Central	44	40	28
Fife	225	214	179
Grampian	0	0	0
Lothian	474	453	328
Borders	0	0	0
Strathclyde	745	306	174
Highland	0	0	0
Tayside	13	11	9

Nature of Charge	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Table No. 2—Dumfries and Galloway		
Vandalism and Malicious Mischief	2	2
Table No. 3—Central Region		
Breach of the peace	32	19
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 Section 41	18	10
Bail etc (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 3	4	4
Vandalism and Malicious Mischief	11	5
Assault	4	4
Reckless Conduct	2	2
Theft	1	0
Table No. 4—Fife Region		
Breach of the peace	129	91
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 Section 41	171	118
Bail etc (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 3	9	8
Vandalism and Malicious Mischief	7	4
Assault	5	2
Explosive Substances Act 1883 Section 2	2	0
Table No. 5—Lothian Region		
Breach of the peace	434	352
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 Section 41	101	89
Bail etc (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 3	44	41
Vandalism and Malicious Mischief	15	12
Assault	10	8
Careless Driving	2	1
Possession of an offensive weapon	1	1
Table No. 6—Strathclyde Region		
Breach of the peace	230	146
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 Section 41	44	27
Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875	24	16
Vandalism and Malicious Mischief	9	8
Possession of an offensive weapon	9	3
Bail etc (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 3	6	6
Theft	3	3
Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 Section 47	1	1
Table No. 7—Tayside Region		
Breach of the peace	9	7
Police (Scotland) Act 1967 Section 41	2	2
Bail etc (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 3	1	1

HOME DEPARTMENT

Robbery and Assault

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis showing for the year 1984 in respect of each London borough of police districts *(a)* the ages and sex of victims of recorded offences of robbery and *(b)* the ages and sex of victims of recorded woundings and serious assaults.

Mr. Mellor: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the readily available information is as given in the following table. To provide a breakdown of this information by boroughs or police districts would involve disproportionate cost; it would require extensive tables of figures, many of which would be small and so subject to wide variation and possibly misleading.

Sex and Age of Victims of Offences Recorded in the Metropolitan Police District 1984

Offence		*Sex and Age of Victim*								
		0-9	*10-15*	*16-24*	*25-39*	*40-59*	*60 and over*	*Total*	*Sex or age not recorded*	*Total recorded offences*
Robbery	Male	123	1,165	2,017	2,440	1,945	601	8,291	836	13,570
	Female	13	202	1,314	1,459	874	581	4,443		
Attempted murder and wounding endangering life	Male	6	47	372	298	114	23	860	169	1,219

Offence		Sex and Age of Victim 0-9	10-15	16-24	25-39	40-59	60 and over	Total	Sex or age not recorded	Total recorded offences
	Female	4	10	73	63	31	9	190		
Other wounding and assault	Male	164	1,122	4,008	3,600	1,923	374	11,191	2,190	17,137
	Female	88	335	1,334	1,264	590	145	3,756		

Crime Statistics

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis showing for the year 1984 in respect of each London borough, separately, the number of reported crimes and the number of offences cleared up in each of the following categories: (1) violence against the person, broken down into *(a)* murder, *(b)* manslaughter, *(c)* death by dangerous driving, *(d)* wounding and *(e)* assaults; (2) robbery broken down into *(a)* less serious offences of violence, *(b)* street robbery of personal property, *(c)* other robbery, *(d)* serious offences of violence and *(e)* robbery with a firearm; (3) sexual offences, broken down into *(a)* rape, *(b)* assaults on females and *(c)* assaults on males; (4) burglary, broken down into *(a)* residential property and *(b)* commercial property; (5) motor vehicle crimes, broken down into *(a)* theft, *(b)* stealing property from and *(c)* damage; and (6) theft and handling stolen goods, broken down into *(a)* theft from the person, *(b)* theft from a dwelling and *(c)* theft of a pedal cycle.

Mr. Mellor: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information that is readily available on notifiable offences recorded and cleared up in each borough or district in 1984 is as given in the following tables. These tables correspond to those which will be placed in the Library for 1985 and each subsequent year, in accordance with the reply to my hon. Friend on 8 May 1985, columns 410-11. To produce a more detailed breakdown by type of offence would involve disproportionate costs and require extensive tables of figures, many of which would be small and so subject to wide variation and possibly misleading.

Notifiable offences cleared up by offence group and L.A. borough or district 1984

Metropolitan police district *Number of offences*

Borough/District	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary and going equipped	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and Forgery	Criminal Damage	Other notifiable offences	Total
Barking	198	26	19	345	970	201	213	30	2,001
Barnet	227	28	55	669	1,684	266	270	24	3,223
Bexley	140	32	11	277	1,028	135	184	6	1,813
Brent	337	59	48	377	1,150	278	339	67	2,655
Bromley	229	21	34	664	1,632	220	293	12	3,105
Camden	359	50	77	635	2,329	784	481	115	4,830
Croydon	303	42	58	618	2,845	497	415	28	4,806
Ealing	361	48	66	523	1,581	314	377	61	3,331
Enfield	193	19	36	436	1,301	172	266	13	2,436
Greenwich	292	56	25	485	1,729	348	312	45	3,292
Hackney	400	67	92	867	1,919	413	380	51	4,189
Hammersmith	387	28	70	542	1,468	381	349	31	3,256
Haringey	292	37	136	502	2,412	408	356	27	4,270
Harrow	178	23	12	184	748	141	236	15	1,537
Havering	153	36	18	230	1,722	262	260	30	2,711
Hillingdon	214	22	21	229	1,253	287	338	57	2,421
Hounslow	214	43	27	400	1,675	380	269	35	3,043
Islington	345	61	67	475	1,449	747	341	102	3,587
Kensington and Chelsea	286	51	62	525	2,709	582	327	136	4,678
Kingston	122	32	14	213	1,141	197	161	9	1,889
Lambeth	565	79	190	884	2,124	467	555	124	4,988
Lewisham	333	32	67	556	2,127	404	294	37	3,850
Merton	127	75	32	344	862	145	183	18	1,786
Newham	395	70	77	543	1,740	509	322	58	3,714
Redbridge	195	33	29	303	1,474	302	238	12	2,586
Richmond	175	26	13	257	835	278	229	18	1,831
Southwark	550	95	93	762	2,261	685	555	102	5,103
Sutton	109	14	12	172	956	133	152	21	1,569
Tower Hamlets	367	62	51	656	1,976	473	418	51	4,054
Wandsworth	389	59	119	612	2,094	300	389	46	4,008
Waltham Forest	208	56	43	321	1,185	228	258	33	2,323
Westminster	863	212	166	1,253	9,277	2,258	940	224	15,193
Broxbourne (part)	40	0	0	59	183	27	28	1	338
Elmbridge (part)	20	2	1	84	129	40	45	1	322
Epping Forest (part)	34	1	2	50	124	13	28	1	253

Borough/District	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary and going equipped	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and Forgery	Criminal Damage	Other notifiable offences	Total
Epsom/Ewell	39	12	2	124	331	174	75	11	768
Hertsmere	65	10	4	192	284	111	68	5	739
Reigate/Banstead (part)	10	0	0	24	51	5	39	0	129
Spelthorne	108	6	4	98	551	154	121	4	1,046
Welwyn Hatfield (part)	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	4
Total MPD*	9,839	1,627	1,844	16,609	61,619	17,801	11,123	2,379	122,841

* Including Thames Division and Central Cheque Squad, which are not included elsewhere in table.

Notifiable offences recorded up by offence group and L.A. borough or district 1984

Metropolitan police district

Number of offences

Borough/District	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary and going equipped	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and Forgery	Criminal Damage	Other notifiable offences	Total
Barking	329	59	93	2,745	5,604	285	2,045	32	11,192
Barnet	443	78	206	5,462	7,801	511	3,079	66	17,646
Bexley	247	61	54	2,627	5,747	260	1,810	12	10,818
Brent	661	104	781	5,485	9,072	499	3,007	87	19,696
Bromley	449	56	185	5,735	10,775	413	3,352	45	21,010
Camden	817	118	520	6,260	19,737	1,092	3,897	133	32,574
Croydon	584	95	304	6,871	14,468	950	3,763	40	27,075
Ealing	681	93	469	5,706	10,311	534	4,110	81	21,985
Enfield	392	61	183	5,026	8,769	351	2,539	20	17,341
Greenwich	601	93	259	5,864	12,791	589	3,996	51	24,242
Hackney	785	126	949	8,541	13,735	743	3,813	58	28,750
Hammersmith	692	78	416	3,704	8,723	611	2,664	37	16,925
Haringey	519	92	749	6,834	10,372	646	2,977	30	22,219
Harrow	294	44	92	2,306	4,475	223	2,115	20	9,569
Havering	318	72	97	2,944	7,204	437	2,167	33	13,272
Hillingdon	415	43	100	2,499	6,695	516	2,653	74	12,995
Hounslow	387	79	97	2,644	6,731	489	2,354	41	12,822
Islington	762	110	572	5,515	13,600	1,064	3,153	108	24,884
Kensington and Chelsea	517	96	389	4,804	14,220	818	2,251	162	23,257
Kingston	250	47	56	1,465	4,681	262	1,461	16	8,238
Lambeth	1,209	160	2,015	10,533	19,457	853	5,820	131	40,178
Lewisham	647	78	616	7,245	14,544	708	3,689	41	27,568
Merton	234	108	120	2,670	5,387	279	2,133	18	10,949
Newham	836	128	496	6,180	11,443	751	3,662	65	23,561
Redbridge	383	71	165	3,551	7,037	490	2,165	20	13,882
Richmond	287	44	54	2,227	5,028	394	1,506	20	9,560
Southwark	1,044	149	896	8,986	18,180	1,047	4,815	108	35,225
Sutton	215	28	58	2,040	5,132	208	1,726	23	9,430
Tower Hamlets	665	93	360	5,316	13,337	679	3,361	57	23,868
Wandsworth	760	132	875	7,164	15,280	637	4,412	54	29,314
Waltham Forest	462	84	316	4,581	8,740	461	2,931	50	17,625
Westminster	1,545	284	915	9,916	42,123	3,151	4,525	354	62,813
Broxbourne (part)	60	1	9	613	1,444	51	572	1	2,751
Elmbridge (part)	37	14	8	770	1,207	49	541	5	2,631
Epping Forest (part)	76	5	19	961	1,656	27	636	2	3,382
Epsom/Ewell	71	18	18	894	1,604	221	695	12	3,533
Hertsmere	114	22	26	1,008	1,816	145	946	5	4,082
Reigate/Banstead (part)	16	1	3	268	380	16	186	0	870
Spelthorne	171	26	25	853	2,859	221	1,029	10	5,194
Welwyn Hatfield (part)	0	0	0	29	69	2	16	0	116
Total MPD*	19,000	3,052	13,570	168,900	374,007	32,382	102,734	2,899	716,545

* Including Thames Division and Central Cheque Squad, which are not included elsewhere in table.

Labour Party Offices, London (Incident)

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the circumstances surrounding an incident on 3 February in which a dustbin was thrown through the window of the Labour party offices in High Street North, E.12, traffic police refused to detain a suspect who had been pointed out to them and an emergency call took over 20 minutes to bring police on to the scene; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commission that following a telephone report to the police by a member of the public who witnessed this incident, a police officer arrived 18 minutes later. The police transit van which coincidentally was in the area was manned by traffic wardens who were not empowered to assist in this matter. Police inquiries into the incident are continuing.

Merseyside Fire Brigade

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the authorised establishment of the Merseyside fire brigade; how many vacancies currently exist; what is its anticipated establishment on disbandment of the Merseyside county council; what is its current level of financing; what is the projected level of financing after disbandment of the Merseyside metropolitan council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The latest information available to us is that the notified uniformed establishment (including control room staff) of the Merseyside Metropolitan County fire brigade was 1,651 at 1 January 1985, and there were 89 vacancies at the end of 1985. The establishment on 1 April will be that to be determined under the Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (Establishment, Support Services and Management Schemes) Regulations 1985. The metropolitan council has no agreed current budget for any of its services. It is estimated that the maximum precept level prescribed for 1986-87 for the new Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority under the draft Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1986 laid on 30 January will yield £28·2 million, and we are satisfied that that sum is sufficient broadly to maintain the existing level of fire protection.

Drugs Abuse

Mr. Lawler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now publish the report prepared for Foreign Ministers of states participating in the 1985 economic summit on the options for individual and collective actions to intensify the fight against drug abuse.

Mr. Hurd: Yes. I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the full list of grants-in-aid made by my Department which appears in Vote 1, section K, of the Defence Estimates.

Extract from Supply Estimates 1985-86

1983-84 Outturn £'000	*1984-85 Total provision* £'000	*Section K: GRANTS IN AID*	*1985-86 Provision* £'000
391	595	K1 Welfare grants in aid§	621
	207	(1) Grant to the Royal British Legion for the relief of distressed Polish ex-servicemen	216
	388	(2) Grant to the Council of Voluntary Welfare Work towards the cost of providing welfare services for service personnel in Germany	405
1,118	3,812	K2 Grants in aid to museums▽■	4,172
	—	(1) Portsmouth Royal Naval Museum and Royal Navy Submarine Museum: towards the cost of purchase of exhibits (£13,000 each): and general expenses including pay, superannuation, fuel, furniture, utilities, works services etc. (£332,000 and £133,000 respectively) Fleet Air Arm Museum and Royal Marines Museum: towards the cost of the purchase of exhibits (£13,000 each). For both museums, expenditure on staff is provided for under subheads A1, A2 and D2 of this vote, and, plus other expenditure elsewhere in the vote, amounts to £157,000. Expenditure on maintenance of buildings is provided for under class I, vote 4 and amounts to £10,000.	517
	1,342	(2) National Army Museum: towards the cost of the purchase of exhibits (£100,000): and general expenses including pay, superannuation, fuel, furniture, utilities, works services etc. (£1,333,000).	1,433
	2,470	(3) Royal Air Force Museum: towards the cost of the purchase of exhibits (£100,000): and general expenses including pay, superannuation, fuel, furniture, utilities, works services etc. (£2,122,000). The approximate value of indemnities given to owners in respect of objects borrowed for exhibition purposes in the service museums at 1 January 1985 was £1,600,000.	2,222
135	151	K3 Grants in aid to services sports control boards towards the cost of staff and administrative expenses■	146
	21	(1) Royal Navy and Royal Marines Sports Control Board	27
	101	(2) Army Sports Control Board	90
	29	(3) Royal Air Force Sports control Board The services sports control boards also receive certain free services, the costs of which, estimated in table 5 for 1985-86, are provided for elsewhere in votes of this class.	29
5,112	5,635	K4 Grant in aid to Royal Hospital Chelsea: towards the cost of pay, superannuation, drugs and medical stores, fuel, food, furniture, utilities etc.	5,817

1983-84 Outturn £'000	1984-85 Total provision £'000	Section K: GRANTS IN AID	1985-86 Provision £'000
		The hospital, which is governed by a board of commissioners, provides accommodation, food etc. for a number of former servicemen eligible for service pensions (eligibility for admittance depends, for example, upon age, or incapacity due to military service and is also governed by charcter. On being admitted, a pensioner ceases to draw his pension, but may receive pay at various rates according to circumstances)	*
520	566	K5 Other grants in aid ■	789
	22	(1) Mutual defence co-operation agreement with United States of America; for sterling administrative expenses incurred in the United Kingdom by the Government of the United States of America in connection with military assistance furnished under the Mutual Defence Assistance Act 1949 (Cmnd. 7894)§	25
	1	(2) Royal Aeronautical Society: towards expenses of co-ordinating and assimilating information§	1
	22	(3) Scott Polar Research Institute: towards expenses of the Institute§	22
	405	(4) World Meteorological Organisation: towards the cost of the voluntary co-operation programme of the World Weather Watch§	458
	65	(5) Air Training Corps: to meet minor expenses of administration and training§	73
	36	(6) Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies: towards expenses of the Institute§	37
		(Certain other costs of the RUSI (principally the cost of the joint MOD/RUSI library) are provided elsewhere on this Vote and amount to £32,700)	
	15	(7) International institute for Strategic Studies§	16
	—	(8) Royal British Legion: to defray the costs of widows' visits to war graves overseas	157
7,276	10,759	Total	11,545

§ Expenditure out of these grants in aid and subscriptions etc to international organisations will not be accounted for in detail to the Comptroller and Auditor General. Any unexpended balances of the sums issued will not be liable to surrender to the Consolidated Fund.

▽ Accounts of expenditure out of these grants in aid will be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Any unexpended balances of the sums issued will not be liable to surrender to the Consolidated Fund.

■ Items where provision is sought under the sole authority of part I of the Estimate and of the confirming Appropriation Act.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Ministry of Defence makes no such payments to governmental agencies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The provision of grants-in-aid is subject to specific conditions which cover such matters as the purposes for which they may be used. My Department takes a close interest in the activities of the recipient bodies and has a right of access to their accounts.

Trident

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the latest progress with the Trident programme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The project remains on programme to enter service as planned in the mid-1990s.

Nuclear Bases (Security)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the security at nuclear bases in Britain.

Mr. Stanley: Security at all such bases is kept under constant review.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual defence expenditure incurred in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimated cost to the defence budget for 1985-86 of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Stanley: The latest estimated cost to the defence budget for Falkland Islands expenditure in 1985-86 is £562 million, including £190 million for replacing equipment lost during the campaign.

Ulster Defence Regiment

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many members in each year since its inception have been discharged from the Ulster Defence Regiment under the provisions of paragraph 9.414, Queen's Regulations 1975 or its equivalent.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only with disproportionate cost.

Military Bases

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all bases and facilities used by the Ministry of Defence and British forces in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* elsewhere.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and effort.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any of the following bases and facilities have been made available for use by United States forces in the United Kingdom: Stornoway, RAF Brize Norton, Cowden, RAF High Wycombe, Holbeach, Jurby, RAF Marham, Oakhanger, Pitreavie, Rosyth, Plymouth, Shetland Islands, Thurso and Wainfleet.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have nothing to add to my answers given on 27 November 1985, at columns *577-78*, and 13 January 1986, at column *538*.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether RAF Cranwell and RAE Bedford are no longer United States bases or facilities.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There is no United States peacetime presence at either of these locations.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence where and for what purpose an additional main operating base for United States forces in the United Kingdom has come into use since 1 March 1983.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The United States air force has seven main operating bases in the United Kingdom; this number has not changed in the period since 1 March 1983. In a written answer on 27 November 1985, at columns *577-78*, the United States Navy's mooring at Holy Loch was, for reasons of simplicity, included under the heading "main operating bases". This should not be taken to imply any change of function or status of this facility.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence why the list of United States bases and facilities given in the answer of 27 November 1985, *Official Report*, column *577-78*, does not include contingency wartime hospitals at Bordon, Newton, Waterbeach, Cosford, Colerne, Bulford, Tidworth and Locking.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Contingency wartime hospitals do not exist at these locations.

United States Military Personnel

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is kept informed by the United States authorities of the precise location and function of each of the 32,000 United States military personnel in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My Department is kept informed of total numbers of United States military personnel deployed in the United Kingdom, and of major changes to the numbers at particular bases associated with changes in operational deployments.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence why the number of United States forces in Britain has increased from 24,000 in January 1980 to approximately 32,000; what functions these 32,000 personnel perform; and if he will list their distribution base by base and facility by facility.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The increase in numbers of United States service personnel stationed in the United Kingdom since 1980 is due to a number of factors, including the build-up of the ground-launched cruise missile programme, the deployment to the United Kingdom of EF111 and TR1 aircraft, and the establishment of facilities at RAF Kemble. The overall function of these personnel is to contribute to NATO's collective defence. On the numbers stationed at individual bases and their precise functions, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his further question of today's date.

Defence Procurement

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the total number of employees at the most recently available date employed by each United Kingdom-based defence procurement contractor paid £5 million or more for equipment in 1983-84, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont Information on the number of employees working for individual companies is collected on a confidential basis and cannot be published.

Security (Disciplinary Action)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many officers and men in the Royal Air Force have been disciplined for major breaches of security in each of the last three years;

(2) how many officers and men in the Royal Navy have been disciplined for major breaches of security in each of the last three years;

(3) how many officers and men in the Army have been diciplined for major breaches of security in each of the last three years;

(4) how many officers and men in the Royal Air Force have left in each of the last three years, due to the fact that their services are no longer required;

(5) how many officers and men have left the Royal Navy, in each of the last three years, due to the fact that their services were no longer required;

(6) how many officers and men in the Army have left in each of the last three years due to the fact that their services were no longer required.

Mr. Lee: I shall answer shortly.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Peter Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total verified membership of registered trade unions within his Department in *(a)* industrial and *(b)* non-industrial grades at the last convenient date.

Mr. Lee: This information is not available from the Government's statistics.

Mr. Peter Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of civil servants employed within his Department in *(a)* industrial and *(b)* non-industrial grades at the last convenient date.

Mr. Lee: As at 1 October 1985 there were 78,330 United Kingdom-based industrial and 94,094 non-industrial civil servants employed within the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Peter Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding check off facilities for members of registered trade unions

which are departmentally recognised but not part of the Council of Civil Service Unions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Secretary of State for Defence has received representations regarding the check-off facilities from one trade union which is not a member of the Council of Civil Service Unions. That union is the Ministry of Defence Staff Association (MODSA). MODSA has recognition for two departmental groups: the royal observer corps and the mooring, salvage and boom officers. Check-off facilities have been made available for these groups.

Host Nation Support

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the technical arrangements which have been concluded between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany following the 1983 treaty on host nation support during crisis or war;

(2) what technical arrangements or other provisions are made for German civilian labour to be provided to assist United Kingdom forces in Germany during crisis or war;

(3) if he will list the subjects of all technical arrangements which may be desired by either party but which remain to be concluded between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany following the 1983 treaty on host nation support during crisis or war, Cmnd. 9202, 1984.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 20 November 1985 at column *200*.

Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any extensions of building facilities are planned for the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston for purposes of the Trident project.

Mr. Lee: A major programme to replace or improve aging capital facilities at the atomic weapons research establishment, Aldermaston, began before the decision on Trident was made in order to maintain a basic nuclear capability for the future and to ensure the achievement of essential health and safety standards. None of the new facilities is therefore solely for the purpose of Trident.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Church Land (Solihull)

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the hon. Member for Wokingham as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will indicate what Church land is owned by the Commissioners in the borough of Solihull.

Sir William van Straubenzee: None.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 February 1986

PRIME MINISTER

EC (Budget)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will set out in a statement the conclusions on the imposing of strict budgetary discipline on the European Economic Community which was agreed at the meeting of the European Council at Fontainebleau; and if she is satisfied that these limits and disciplines are being adhered to.

The Prime Minister: A copy of the budgetary discipline text, as adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December 1984 is available in the Library.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury told the House on 3 February at column 43, the most important element in budget discipline, the agricultural guideline, has been fully respected in the 1986 budget as adopted by the Parliament. The non-obligatory spending totals in the Budget are, however, incompatible with the Council's budget discipline conclusions. The Council and individual member states, including the United Kingdom, are challenging the budget as adopted by the Parliament before the European Court.

European Assembly

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister why she agreed to references in Community law to the European Assembly being altered to the European Parliament in the European Act.

The Prime Minister: The European Act follows current usage in the Community. Whatever terminology is used, the nature of the institution is unchanged.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will set out in a statement the additional rights, entitlements and privileges which will be given to the European Assembly in consequence of the European Act.

The Prime Minister: Under a new co-operation procedure, an absolute majority of the Members of the European Parliament will be able, in certain areas, to propose amendments to Commission proposals. It will be for the Council to decide whether to accept such amendments. The European Parliament will also have the right of assent to new accessions and new association agreements.

EC (Health and Safety)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister why the United Kingdom withdrew its reserve in relation to majority voting on health and safety directives by the Council of Ministers; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: As I made clear to the House on 5 December 1985 in my statement on the Luxembourg European Council, the United Kingdom reserve on qualified majority voting in respect of the proposed EC treaty amendment on working conditions was entered because we wished to avoid unfair burdens being imposed on small and medium-sized businesses. That aim has been secured through the inclusion in the treaty text of a specific provision protecting the position of such undertakings, thus enabling the United Kingdom reserve to be lifted.

Cabinet Office

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister with whom ministerial responsibility lies for disciplinary action against civil servants in the Cabinet Office.

The Prime Minister: I am Minister with departmental responsibility for the Cabinet Office; I am assisted in the day-to-day discharge of this responsibility by the Minister of State, Privy Council Office. Disciplinary powers are exercised, in the Cabinet Office as in other Departments, by the permanent head of the Department.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will list the activities of the Cabinet Office for which she doe not have ministerial responsibility.

The Prime Minister: I have departmental responsibility for all of the activities of the Cabinet Office, with the exception of the Civil Service Commissioners who have certain independent responsibilities under Orders in Council.

European Union

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column 437, if it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to transform relations amongst member states of the EEC into a European union; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Our policy is unchanged. The phraseology used by my hon. Friend appears in the Preamble to the Single European Act which itself refers back to the Stuttgart Solemn Declaration of 1983.

Leak Inquiries

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister in what publication the rules and procedures of a leak inquiry are contained.

The Prime Minister: None. For each inquiry, the procedure is suited to the needs and circumstances of the case.

Fisheries

Dr. Godman asked the Prime Minister what co-operation there is between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the DAFS in monitoring the additional demands made on the fisheries protection services by Spanish and Portuguese accession.

The Prime Minister: There is full co-operation, including frequent meetings between the two fisheries Departments, to discuss the deployment of fisheries protection resources in response to enforcement needs. In addition, both Departments co-operate closely with the authorities in France and the Republic of Ireland on the surveillance arrangements.

Westland plc

Mr. McNamara asked the Prime Minister if she will list all contacts during 1984 and 1985 between Her Majesty's Government on the one hand and *(a)* Lord Aldington and *(b)* any other representatives of Westland plc on the other.

The Prime Minister: In 1984 and 1985, as before and since, there were very numerous contacts between Westland and Government departments, especially the Department of Trade and Industry, the sponsor Department for the company, and the Ministry of Defence, its most important customer. It would be impracticable to list these contacts.

Privatisation

Mr. Hickmet asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about the effects on the British economy since 1979 as a result of the Government's privatisation programme; and what future effects she expects.

The Prime Minister: Privatisation, through exposing former state-owned companies more fully to the disciplines and opportunities of the market, and reducing political interference, improves the efficiency of businesses that are crucial to our overall economic performance. As such, it forms an important part of the Government's overall strategy for long-term economic growth.

The privatisation programme is also promoting the widening of share ownership, further reinforcing the enterprise culture that is essential for economic success.

Since 1979 12 major companies, comprising some 20 per cent. of the state commercial sector, have been privatised. By the end of this Parliament, a further 20 per cent. should have been transferred to the private sector.

Mr. Hickmet asked the Prime Minister if she will list the countries whose Governments have asked the United Kingdom for information or help in formulating their own privatisation policies.

The Prime Minister: The success of the United Kingdom's privatisation programme is internationally recognised. A number of overseas Governments and Members of Parliament have approached Government Departments here, as well as City institutions, privatised companies and other bodies, to ask about our privatisation experience. It would not be practical to list all the Governments who have made these inquiries, as no central record is kept.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

24. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate how many people will be employed from Wales on the construction of the Channel tunnel; in which industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is for the Channel Tunnel Group-France-Manche to decide, subject to European Community rules, how to award contracts for construction of the Link and for the supply of materials. I know it is CTG-FM's intention to invite bids from companies throughout the United Kingdom. No doubt the business will go to those which are most competitive.

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to the possible involvement of private capital in developing rail services to serve the Channel tunnel.

Mr. David Mitchell: Channel fixed link shuttle rail services will be financed and operated entirely by the private sector. I would welcome any proposals from BR for the involvement on a commercial basis of private capital in the provision of through train services.

Vehicle Relicensing

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the plans he has for improved vehicle relicensing facilities.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Following an agreement I concluded with the chairman of the Post Office last year, an extra 500 sub-post offices will be added to the vehicle relicensing network over the period to the middle of 1988. This will give a total of over 3,500 post offices which can be used for vehicle relicensing. In addition motorists who are not in possession of a licence renewal reminder form or a registration document will shortly be able to relicense at the Post Office. Steps are also being taken to tighten up the security of this transaction. Motorists will then be able to use post offices for virtually all vehicle relicensing transactions.

Radioactive Materials (Transportation)

Mr. Allen Adams asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now take steps to collect information on the movement of nuclear and other radioactive materials; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The regulations which cover the transport of radioactive materials require adequate protection to be built in to the containers used, so that the materials could not present a significant danger, even in the event of a severe accident. Safety is not therefore dependent on special routeing. No useful purpose would be served by collecting information on the movement of individual consignments.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the report on counter-pollution measures to protect marine and bird life from sea and shore pollution from shipping.

Mr. Ridley: I have no plans to publish a report on counter-pollution measures to protect marine and bird life from sea and shore pollution from shipping. If the hon. Member is referring to the promised report on counter-pollution measures taken following the grounding of the Bridgeness off the Pembrokeshire coast in June 1985, then I refer him to the answer of 5 December 1985 at columns 304-5. As promised in that answer, a copy of the report has been placed in the House Library.

Road Accidents

Mr. Macfarlane asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorists' deaths occurred on the M1, M6 and M3 between June 1984 and June 1985.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Following is the information:

Deaths on motorways M1, M3 and M6 July 1984 to June 1985

	M1	*M3*	*M6*
Pedestrians*	6	2	1
Motor cyclists	3	0	2
Car occupants	24	4	27
Light goods vehicle occupants	4	1	3
Heavy goods vehicle occupants	5	0	5
TOTAL	42	7	38

* Includes drivers or passengers of motor vehicles who had left their vehicle and who were standing or walking when hit by a vehicle.

Leeds (Traffic Problems)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made initiating a study of traffic problems east of Leeds following his decision on the A1-M1 link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I hope to make a further statement soon.

Stansted Airport

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the list he has received of highway improvements schemes from the Hertfordshire and Essex county councils relating to the expansion of Stansted airport, together with the estimated costs when they are available to him; and if he will indicate his response to the request that these schemes should be funded by additional capital allocations to the councils concerned.

Mr. Ridley: The councils have provided the following lists with their estimates of costs:

	£ million
a) Hertfordshire (dual carriageway unless stated)	
A120 Puckeridge to Little Hadham	7·78
A120 Little Hadham to Bishop's Stortford	4·98
A120 Bishop's Stortford Bypass	5·97
Bishop's Stortford SW distributor—(single carriageway)	3·20
A414 Stansted Abbots to Harlow (Eastwick)	5·98
A414 Harlow (Eastwick) to A1184	6·00
Total	33·91
b) Essex	
New bypass of Takeley requiring amendments to the airport road system and extension to the Great Dunmow bypass	16·00
Widening of Great Dunmow bypass	1·50
Widening from Great Dunmow to Rayne or provision of second carriageway (costed option)	10·00
M11/B1383 interchange at Quendon	3·00
New single and dual carriageway from A1184 to M11 (Harlow link)—estimate for single carriageway	6·00
Widening of A120 from B1383 to M11	1·50
Total	38·00

We will meet representatives of both Councils to discuss these and other proposals. I do not speculate on the outcome. We shall take into account any proposals for capital expenditure on local roads when the Councils submit their Transport Policies and Programmes for future years.

Operator Licensing System

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the 'O' operator licensing system.

Mr. David Mitchell: Several aspects of the PSV operator licensing system were debated during the passage of the Transport Act 1985. On the goods side the department is currently considering representations on the proposed changes to the arrangements for charging fees, and also responses to the review of the environmental provisions which came into effect in June 1984.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to alter the regulations concerning the 'O' operator licensing system.

Mr. David Mitchell: Various changes in the PSV operator licensing system will be made by statutory instruments during this year as part of the implementation of the Transport Act 1985. On the goods side, the Department has recently consulted interested parties on amendments to the regulations which would affect the basis on which fees for operator licences are charged.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Motoring Convictions

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the police maintain records of minor motoring convictions following disqualification.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The police do not maintain records of minor motoring convictions.

Prisoners (Accommodation)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria were used in deciding the amount of double cell accommodation to be built into Woolwich and Bicester prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In relation to Woolwich prison, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 5 December at column 320. The design for Bicester prison is based in part on the Woolwich design, and similar considerations apply.

National Reporting Centre

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often he met the chief constable in charge of the national reporting centre throughout the dispute between the National Union of Mineworkers and the National Coal Board.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The president of the Association of Chief Police Officers has control of the centre ex officio. My right hon. and learned Friend the then Home Secretary met the two chief constables who were successively president of ACPO during the period of the dispute on a number of occasions.

Auld Committee

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days the Auld committee on Sunday trading sat for; from how many witnesses it received oral evidence; from how many witnesses it received written evidence; and what was the total estimated cost of the inquiry.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that not all this information is readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member.

Immigration

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current waiting time for persons holding British overseas citizenship who do not have an automatic right of abode but have applied, for instance, on quota systems, for the right of abode, broken-down by each country of application.

Mr. Waddington: Certain British overseas citizens are eligible for admission to the United Kingdom under the special voucher scheme introduced in 1968. A British overseas citizen who meets the requirements of this scheme may be issued with a special voucher, which does not confer on the holder a right of abode in the United Kingdom but enables him to come to this country for immediate settlement.

In India, applicants for special vouchers who were interviewed at the end of 1985 had waited eight years but current estimates suggest that those now applying will have to wait for about four years as the number of applications lodged has declined in recent years. In East Africa applicants for special vouchers were interviewed within 1½ months and there are no queues elsewhere.

Police (Discipline)

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the right of appeal against the internal disciplinary system in the police forces has been exercised (i) for members of the regular constabulary and (ii) for members of the special constabulary for each of the past three years.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Appeals were received from members of police forces dealt with for offences against discipline as follows:

Year	*Number*
1983	*76
1984	†76
1985	*71

* Including eight withdrawn before determination.
† Including nine withdrawn before determination.

There is no formal discipline code for special constables and therefore no procedures for appeals to the Secretary of State.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Macfarlane asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how precisely police forces record the location of accidents involving the deaths of motorists on motorways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that the police record the location of cars involved in accidents on motorways by reference to the numbered marker posts situated at 100 m intervals along each carriageway. Photographs are also normally taken in fatal accident cases.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in the *Official Report* the proportion of the population of each police authority area in England covered by neighbourhood watch schemes.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information required is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Visitors

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department takes to ensure that persons admitted to the United Kingdom as visitors leave the United Kingdom upon the expiry of their leave to enter.

Mr. Waddington: The conditions on which persons are admitted to the United Kingdom as visitors require them to leave the country before their period of leave expires, save where an application is made for an extension of stay or change of immigration status.

The embarkation of some visitors is confirmed by reference to the record on the current computer system and those who overstay their leave are liable to prosecution or to the other enforcement action for which provision is made in the Immigration Act 1971.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports have been published by the Animal Experimentation Advisory Committee since 1979.

Mr. Mellor: In 1979 the advisory committee published a report on the LD50 test. In 1981 it published a report on the framework of legislation to replace the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876.

Military Aid to Civil Power

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the mechanism whereby military personnel are mobilised in aid of the police for exercises such as those at Heathrow and for other public order duties;

(2) to whom the police apply when seeking assistance from the military; and whether an application from a chief constable or Commissioner of Police is required to be considered by or supported by any independent individual or body prior to the request going forward.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A decision to request the deployment of military units to Heathrow is taken at a senior level in the Metropolitan police. The request is made to the Home Office where it is considered in consultation with other interested Government Departments. If no objections are raised, the police are given authority to proceed with the detailed arrangements and the Ministry of Defence authorise the deployment of the military units.

As to public order matters, the police have the primary responsibility for maintaining the peace. A chief officer of

police who required reinforcements in dealing with public disorder would seek them first from other chief officers. Under long-standing arrangements, the deployment of service men to assist the police, as a measure of last resort, would require the approval of Ministers of the Crown.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what section or department inside the Home Office is specifically responsible for military aid to the civil power; and how many people are employed on such work.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Home Office aspects of this subject are dealt with by the police department. No one is employed full time on it.

Sinsemilla

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the extent of the availability and illicit consumption of the drug sinsemilla, a derivative of the cannabis plant; what steps he proposes to take to control the incidence of this drug; if he will call for reports from chief constables as to the numbers of prosecutions of persons alleged to be dealing in this drug or to have exhibited posters offering it for sale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have no evidence at present that sinsemilla is available on any significant scale in the United Kingdom. As a form of cannabis it is already controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and there are adequate powers to deal with persons who deal in it or who offer it for sale. My right hon. Friend has no plans, in the short term, for calling for special reports from chief constables, but we shall ensure that the Home Office drugs inspectorate monitors the situation.

WALES

Training

13. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the number of training places in Wales in the current year and the number planned for 1986-87; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Yes. This year the Manpower Services Commission expects that around 10,200 adults will start on training courses. The provisional planned figure for next year is around 14,000, which represents a three-fold increase since 1984-85. The two-year YTS will commence in April and 27,000 young people are expected to participate in 1986-87.

Community Programme

14. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the operation of the community programme in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Yes. At the end of December some 12,090 people were employed on the community programme in Wales and the Manpower Services Commission are confident of filling the 20,000 places allocated to Wales by June of this year.

Wales Tourist Board

15. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the proposal by the Trade and Industry Committee that the Wales tourist board should be abolished.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I have received letters from two local authorities and two town councils; and the Wales tourist board has responded to my invitation to comment on this report. I also took note of the questions and comments of members of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs when I appeared before them on 29 January.

A5 (Traffic Flows)

16. **Mr. Best** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about projected traffic flows along the A5 on Anglesey after the completion of the A55 dual carriageway and the roll-on roll-off deep-water berth in Holyhead.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I have received representations about future traffic flows on the A5 in Anglesey from my hon. Friend and from the Holyhead town council.

Primary Schools

17. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many primary schools in Wales have *(a)* fewer than 50 pupils and *(b)* 50 pupils or more; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: 354 and 1,442 respectively.

Farm Incomes

18. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average per capita income of self-employed farmers in Wales in each of the years 1980 to 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Data showing net incomes of self-employed farmers are not available. Data showing net incomes on full-time farms for the period up to 1982-83 are published in "Farm Accounts in Wales", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Figures for 1983-84 and 1984-85, which are the latest available, are given in press notices issued by the Welsh Office, copies of which I am sending to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales by what proportion farm incomes have fallen during each of the past two years *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: For Wales it is estimated that average farm incomes fell by 4 per cent. between 1982-83 and 1983-84 and by 10 per cent. between 1983-84 and 1984-85. These latest estimates are based on the farm accounts of a sample of farms. Separate figures are not available for the area of the Vale of Glamorgan council.

Advance Factories (New Quay)

19. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to build advance factories in New Quay, Ceredigion, during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No provision is made for advance factory building in New Quay in the 1986-87 construction

programme of the Development Board for Rural Wales which I approved last month. Two factories are to be built in Ceredigion, both in Aberystwyth. Building programmes for the years after 1986-87 have yet to be determined.

Hill Farmers

20. **Mr. Harvey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken to safeguard the livelihoods of marginal hill farmers in Wales after the 43 per cent. fall in agricultural incomes last year.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The net farm income of hill and upland farms in Wales for 1985-86 is now forecast to decline by much less than the 43 per cent. national figure. The Government have already taken action to safeguard the livelihoods of farmers in hill areas by significantly increasing the hill livestock compensatory allowances for 1986 and by granting fodder aid in those areas most severely affected by last summer's poor harvest.

Social Services (Expenditure)

21. **Dr. Roger Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he takes to ensure the adequacy of standards and even distribution of resources in the community care, health and social services sectors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: My right hon. Friend has increased the financial resources for the Health Service in Wales to record levels. To ensure that these resources are used effectively to improve patient care he has implemented the Griffiths report on the management of the NHS.

The provision of personal social services is the responsibility of individual local authorities.

Teachers (Dispute)

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings he has had since Christmas with the teaching trade unions in Wales to discuss the teachers' pay dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None. Responsibility for teachers pay rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Urban Programme

22. **Mr. Terlezki** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the level of resources allocated to the urban programme since 1979.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Resources allocated in Wales to the urban programme, which since 1982 has also included the urban development grant scheme, have increased from £7·1 million in 1979-80 to £29 million in 1986-87, or by 144 per cent. in real terms. The total allocated since 1979-80 is £148 million.

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the urban development grant projects approved by his Department during 1985, stating for each project the total amount of grant, the percentage of grant comprising the total cost of the project, the name of the public or private sector participants within each project, and the cost from public funds for each new job created within each project.

Mr. Mark Robinson: A list of all projects approved for urban development grant in Wales and which are completed, currently under way, or have yet to commence has been placed in the Library of the House. This contains, for each project, a brief description, the name of the sponsoring local authority and private sector participant(s), the total amount of grant awarded and the estimated total development cost.

Seven projects were approved in the calender year 1985, of which two were approved-in-principle only and are subject to further negotiations on the precise level of grant. For the remaining five just over £9·5 million of urban development grant will bring forward a total investment of around £52 million. The average estimated public expenditure per new job to be created in commercial, industrial and mixed projects is £5,047. This ignores jobs retained, temporary jobs and the other social, economic and environmental benefits.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average length of time taken in National Health Service laboratories in Wales to process and diagnose cervical smears.

Mr. Mark Robinson: This information is not collected by the Welsh Office. In January informal inquiries of Welsh health authorities indicated that the time taken for test results to be notified varied between 48 hours and nine weeks of the test being taken. Apart from one laboratory, all were processing them within the eight weeks recommended by the joint NHS-Welsh Office working group on cervical cytology screening services in Wales, as the maximum time.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Buildings

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the surveys his Department is carrying out into school buildings; and if he plans to publish the results.

Mr. Dunn: The Department is seeking the help of local education authorities in carrying out a sample survey of school building improvement needs. The sample comprises about 1,000 county and controlled primary and secondary schools in England. The survey, which has been developed in consultation with the local authority associations, seeks information on the scale and nature of work which might be necessary to bring the schools in the sample to defined standards of educational adequacy and physical condition. Copies of the Department's circular letter on the survey and of the survey questionnaire and notes of guidance have been placed in the Library. My right hon. Friend will inform the House of the outcome of the survey.

ILEA Schools (Admission of Police)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to the answer given to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland, on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *571*, what information he has as to the willingness of Quinton Kynaston school, St. John's Wood, NW8, to admit the police.

Mr. Chris Patten: I understand that the school does admit the police and that a number of visits are currently being planned.

Japanese and Russian Language Teaching

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many universities in the United Kingdom offer Japanese and how many Russian; and how many students are studying one or other, or both.

Mr. Walden: There are 28 universities in the United Kingdom which are offering degree courses in October 1986 in Russian language and studies and four which offer Japanese. In 1984, the latest year for which student numbers are available, there were 530 full-time undergraduates studying Russian language and studies. The numbers studying Japanese are not collected separately but are included within a group of 546 studying Oriental, Asian and African languages and/or studies.

Teachers (Dispute)

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he intends to take to seek to resolve the teachers' pay dispute in Wales.

Sir Keith Joseph: As I said in my statement on 3 February, at column 29, I welcome the provisional agreement reached at ACAS which holds out the promise of a settlement of the 1985 dispute, a return to normal working in the schools in England and Wales and constructive negotiations on pay, pay structure, duties and conditions of service. I hope that we shall soon see progress in negotiations which will justify the release of the additional resources which the Government have set aside for an increase in teachers' pay.

University Staff

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what meetings he has had with the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, the Association of University Teachers and other groups concerning proposals to review the system of academic tenure in universities.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend discussed the Government's intentions to limit academic tenure with the Committee of Vice chancellors and Principals in October 1984 and with the Association of University Teachers in January 1985. Both bodies have been invited to comment on the detailed proposals for legislation published on 9 December last.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many individuals would be affected by the proposed changes in the system of academic tenure for university lecturers.

Mr. Walden: The proposed limitation of academic tenure, as opposed to any amendment of provision for dismissal for "good cause", will apply only to those appointed after a future date yet to be specified, and to existing staff on promotion. It is therefore not possible to identify the numbers that will be affected.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has made any recent estimate of the degree to which university academic staff salaries are comparable to those on offer in industry to individuals of similar qualification and experience; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: No. The Government continues to believe that the prime determinants of pay levels should be the employers' ability to pay and the need to recruit, retain and motivate staff of the right quality. We noted in our Green Paper on higher education that national undifferentiated pay scales may not always enable institutions to attract staff whose skills are in most demand elsewhere and suggested that the pay structure in the universities should reflect to a greater extent the differential supply of, and demand for, abilities in different subjects.

Students (Maintenance Allowances)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he is currently giving to the introduction of a national system of maintenance allowances for students undertaking approved courses in schools or colleges beyond the period of compulsory education.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) on 29 November at column 689.

School Examinations

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the costs which will fall upon local education authorities as a result of the proposed implementation of the new GCSEs; and if he will give *(a)* the proposed examination fee, *(b)* the revised cost for equipment, stationery and text books, and *(c)* the financial implications for staffing costs in schools as a result of the new examination syllabuses.

Mr. Chris Patten: The general criteria for the GCSE provide that syllabuses and methods of assessment should not make unreasonable demands on human or financial resources. The Government's expenditure plans should allow authorities to make appropriate provision for the GCSE provided that they take advantage of the scope for efficiency savings and contain their costs. The GCSE examining groups have not yet determined examinations fees for the GCSE.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the new GCSEs will meet the educational and academic standards now available in the GCE and CSE examinations.

Mr. Chris Patten: Yes.

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the planned introduction of the new GCSEs in 1988 will be influenced in any way by the consultative and preparatory process involving teachers who are currently involved in dispute with their employers.

Mr. Chris Patten: As my right hon. Friend has recently confirmed, the Government do not intend to postpone the introduction of the GCSE. A national training programme, intended to help teachers with their preparations for the new examination courses, is now well under way.

Curriculum Development

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total number of advisers and other non-teaching staff employed *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by local education authorities on curriculum development for each year from 1975 to 1986; and what was the total cost by year.

Mr. Chris Patten: Although the Department funds a variety of curriculum development work, officials are not themselves directly involved in carrying it forward. Her Majesty's inspectors of schools do engage in and support curriculum development by such means as their programme of short courses for teachers and participation in in-service training activities arranged by local education authorities. They also stimulate such work through their publications, inspection reports and day-to-day contacts with the education service. Information is not available to quantify or to cost the amount of time spent on these various activities. Nor is information available centrally in respect of the work of advisers and other non-teaching staff employed by local education authorities.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

European Assembly

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Attorney-General why Her Majesty's Government have decided to take action against the European Assembly in the European Court under article 173 of the treaty of Rome which provides the court with jurisdiction over the actions of the Council of Ministers and the Commission; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: In its application to the European Court of Justice, the United Kingdom, in common with the views shared by the Council and the other Member states bringing actions against the European Assembly, contends that, despite the apparently restrictive wording of Article 173 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community and Article 146 of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, those provisions on their true construction extend to Acts of the European Assembly. The United Kingdom also relies upon Article 38 of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, which expressly confers jurisdiction on the European Court to declare an act of the Assembly to be void. As the budget of the European Communities covers expenditure of all three Communities, the application refers to jurisdictional bases in each of the three treaties.

Leak Inquiries (Immunity)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Attorney-General whether the immunity granted in a leak inquiry pre-empts any possible decision by the police to institute a prosecution.

The Attorney-General: If and to the extent that I authorise the grant of immunity from prosecution, its practical effect is to preclude prosecution by any other person or authority, including the police. The exact nature and extent of the immunity granted in any particular case will depend on the facts of that case.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the extent and disbursement of, and expenditure on, United Kingdom aid to the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference.

Mr. Raison: British aid provided under the auspices of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference amounts so far to £1,568,000 in terms of actual expenditure. It has been spent on transport and communications projects, a fisheries study, and training awards. We have, however, pledged a total of £22 million primarily for regional transport projects.

ENERGY

NCB (Enterprise) Ltd.

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest activities of NCB (Enterprise) Ltd.

Mr. David Hunt: At the end of January 1986, NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. had committed £7·1 million assisting 311 projects to create 4,412 job opportunities. Additionally, at the end of December 1985 just under £1 million had been committed to assist 45 enterprise agencies.

Energy Savings Opportunities (Exhibition)

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will arrange for an exhibition of energy savings opportunities in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. David Hunt: I have arranged that there will be an exhibition on energy savings opportunities in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 3 March to Friday 7 March, which I have agreed to open at 4.30 pm on the Monday.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report* the governmental agencies to which his Department gives grant aid which in turn provide financial support for voluntary bodies and organisations, and the size of the grant so given in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Dr. Boyson: The information for the financial year ended 31 March 1985 is:

Total grant paid by agency to voluntary bodies

Sponsoring Department	*Agency*	*£*
Northern Ireland Office	Probation Board for Northern Ireland	623,000
Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland housing Executive	23,901

Sponsoring Department	Agency	£
Department of Economic Development	Local Enterprise Development Unit	1,600,000
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	Arts Council for Northern Ireland	2,161,300
	Sports Council for Northern Ireland	300,829

Matrimonial and Family Provisions Act 1984

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to publish proposals for a draft order applying to Northern Ireland the provisions of the Matrimonial and Family Provisions Act 1984.

Dr. Boyson: It is the Government's intention to publish proposals in the near future for the implementation in Northern Ireland of Law Commission reports Nos. 112, 116 and 117.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the arrangements to monitor the implementation of the Government's equal opportunities policy in the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and what are the figures for the composition of the Northern Ireland Civil Service in terms of religion, sex and disability.

Dr. Boyson: I announced on 4 December 1984 the publication of an equal opportunities policy statement which proclaimed and emphasised the commitment of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to equal opportunity for all its staff on the basis of ability, qualifications and aptitude and without regard to religion, sex or any other irrelevant factor.

A comprehensive monitoring system has now been set up by the Department of Finance and Personnel. It is generally accepted that the nature of the management arrangements for the school where the civil servant was educated is the best proxy for determining a person's religious affiliation in Northern Ireland and this information is now held on the computer for just under 95 per cent. of the non-industrial Northern Ireland Civil Service and, within that figure, for 99 per cent. of general service grades in post at 1 January 1985. It was sought by questionnaire supplemented by reference to personal files, and was validated by the issue to all staff of transcripts of the information. As new recruits join the Civil Service, the appropriate information will be added to the data base.

For the purpose of monitoring, "Protestants" are defined as those who were educated in a school attended mainly by Protestant pupils, "Roman Catholics" as those who were educated in a school managed by the Roman Catholic Church and attended mainly by Roman Catholic pupils, and "unknown" as staff who were educated outside Northern Ireland or whose school management type was either undefined or unknown. At this stage of the exercise, disabled staff have been defined as those who are or were at some stage of their careers recorded as registered disabled persons.

A preliminary analysis of the database gives the global composition of the Northern Ireland Civil Service in percentage terms as follows:

	Male	Female	Total
Protestant	30·2	28·2	58·4
Roman Catholic	14·7	18·0	32·7
Unknown	6·0	2·9	8·9
TOTAL	50·9	49·1	100

Note: 1·2 per cent. of this total are disabled.

This analysis is not directly comparable with that previously produced by the Fair Employment Agency for Northern Ireland in its report on the Northern Ireland Civil Service because, for example, it includes some 1,600 staff in ancillary and related grades who were excluded from the Fair Employment Agency's investigation, the proportion of "unknown" is considerably less, and religious affiliation has been based mainly on more accurate information about schooling.

It is intended to analyse the data in considerably greater detail and to produce later in the year a report which will include information similar to that contained in the Fair Employment Agency's report, e.g. disaggregated by Department, broad salary bands, and age, and which will so far as possible provide comparisons with the data in the Fair Employment Agency's report.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of claimant couples with children in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

Benefit	Number of claimant couples	Latest available date
Family income supplement	11,541	31 December 1983
Unemployment benefit	3,570	8 November 1984
Supplementary benefit	33,332	31 December 1983
Unemployment benefit and supplementary allowance	24,752	31 December 1983

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of lone parent claimants in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The information requested in respect of unemployment benefit is not available. The rest of the information is as follows:

Benefit	Lone parent claimants	Latest available date
Family income supplement	1,725	31 December 1983
Supplementary benefit	14,693	31 December 1983
Unemployment benefit and supplementary allowance	139	31 December 1983

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* supplementary benefit and *(c)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit excluding lone parents, couples with children and pensioners for the latest available year in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

Benefit	*Number of claimants*	*Latest available date*
Unemployment benefit	22, 265	8 November 1984
Supplementary benefit	73,900	7 December 1983
Unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit	2,500	7 December 1983

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* sickness benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit pension, *(c)* industrial disablement benefit and *(d)* non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension or *(e)* severe disablement allowance for the latest available year in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The number of claimants in receipt of the benefits listed, at the latest available date, is as follows:

Benefit	*Number of claimants*	*Latest available date*
Sickness benefit	9,901	27 December 1985
Invalidity benefitpension	38,287	27 December 1985
Industrial disablement benefitpension	5,185	30 September 1984
NCIP, HNCIP or severe disablement allowance	11,841	27 December 1985

Single Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of single payment awards to the rate per 1,000 claimants in each office in Northern Ireland to *(a)* persons under pensionable age not required to register for work, *(b)* persons under pensionable age required to register for work and *(c)* persons over pensionable age for the latest available year; and what is (i) the rate per 1,000 claimants and (ii) the average payment to persons in each of the categories listed.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows in respect of 1985:

Social Security Office	*Number of single payments*			*Rate per 1,000 claimants for supplementary benefits*		
	Under pension age not required to register	*Under pension age required to register*	*Over pension age*	*Under pension age not required to register*	*Under pension age required to register*	*Over pension age*
Andersonstown	5,212	8,838	738	2,800	2,218	787
Antrim	3,810	7,141	750	2,552	2,332	557
Armagh	1,831	3,793	1,359	1,802	1,698	876
Ballymena	1,877	3,602	491	1,303	1,495	277
Ballymoney	1,757	2,936	915	1,573	1,536	695
Ballynahinch	303	405	199	927	927	389
Banbridge	1,243	1,739	488	1,773	1,354	427
Bangor	979	1,620	373	970	1,000	218
Carrickfergus	1,572	2,715	632	1,953	1,975	823
Coleraine	2,818	4,172	596	1,943	1,943	376
Cookstown	1,393	3,041	1,029	1,811	1,896	1,039
Corporation Street*	5,095	8,491	1,497	1,741	1,526	532
Downpatrick*	1,080	1,842	298	2,734	1,659	385
Dungannon	2,929	4,560	1,899	2,192	1,795	1,080
Enniskillen	2,354	3,429	1,770	1,268	1,143	585
Falls Road	8,692	11,199	1,112	3,427	2,356	651
Holywood Road	3,928	5,986	1,559	2,004	1,674	561
Kilkeel*	370	606	171	1,069	1,237	365
Knockbreda	1,861	2,459	742	1,356	1,069	271
Larne	1,327	2,591	346	1,872	1,777	471
Limavady	1,369	2,903	624	2,545	1,631	823
Lisburn	4,075	6,984	2,155	2,746	2,607	1,031
Londonderry*	5,556	9,179	1,948	1,582	1,172	669
Lurgan*	3,015	5,506	1,227	2,842	1,737	814
Magherafelt	1,321	2,296	1,122	1,263	1,146	725
Newcastle	630	1,121	393	1,745	1,611	692
Newry*	3,406	6,655	2,201	1,623	1,461	804
Newtownabbey*	3,441	5,785	1,202	2,323	2,016	760
Newtownards	946	1,369	489	940	871	322
Omagh	3,653	3,892	1,768	3,007	1,715	1,132
Portadown	1,847	2,826	719	2,023	1,857	534
Shaftesbury Square	1,917	3,289	883	1,432	1,019	497
Shankill	2,612	3,558	993	1,843	1,465	583
Strabane	3,325	6,079	2,154	2,276	2,082	1,288

* Data incomplete due to industrial action.

1. The rate of single payments of supplementary benefit per 1,000 claimants in Northern Ireland in 1985, based on the average number of claimants in the year, was 1,434.

2. The average single payment paid to persons in Northern Ireland in 1985 who were:

(a) under pension age and not required to register for work was £115·85;

(b) under pension age and required to register for work was £116·75;

(c) over pension age £108·98.

Pensioners

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of claimant pensioners *(a)* aged over 80 years and *(b)* aged between 60 and 79 years in receipt of (i) retirement pension, (ii) supplementary pension and (iii) retirement pension and supplementary pension for the latest available year in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

Number of Pensioners

Benefit	*Over 80*	*Aged 60-79*	*Latest available date*
Retirement Pension	*37,616	†171,802	30 November 1985
Supplementary Pension	12,430	41,124	7 December 1983
Retirement Pension and Supplementary Pension	11,695	35,810	7 December 1983

* Includes 3,375 Non-contributory Pensioners.
† Includes 51 Non-contributory Pensioners.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inland Revenue (Cash Limit)

Mr. Gregory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed in the cash limit for the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Moore: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XIII vote 6 will be increased by £21,900,000 from £858,715,000 to £880,615,000. This is to cover, in part, some necessary additional expenditure on computers that will be offset by savings in later years and, in part, the cost of overtime associated with an initiative, announced by the Department on 12 November 1985, to reduce arrears of work in local tax offices. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planning total of public expenditure.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the tax treatment of payments under the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Moore: A number of representations about the tax treatment of the enterprise allowance have been received.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will set out in tabular form, for each year since 1969 to the latest now available, identifiable public expenditure by programme in each standard region of England and in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales expressed *(a)* in total cash terms and *(b)* in cash terms per head of population.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Malone) on 22 February 1985 at column *606* which gave figures back to 1979-80. I shall arrange for more recent data to be published in the *Official Report* as soon as it becomes available. However, this will only cover identifiable public expenditure in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; total public expenditure figures for regions within England are not available. Figures going back to 1969 are not available.

Police Officers (Rent Allowance)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is the practice of the Inland Revenue to seek to raise an assessment on grant paid to police officers by police authorities to compensate for tax on rent allowance paid in the previous year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I can confirm that the grant to which the hon. Member refers is chargeable to income tax and is assessed accordingly.

Capital Movements

Mr. Shore asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what was the capital outflow from the United Kingdom in each year since 1978 to *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* the countries of the EEC, excluding Spain and Portugal; and what was the capital inflow to the United Kingdom from these countries for the same period.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The figures available for capital transactions between the United Kingdom and the EC as a whole (excluding Spain and Portugal) over the period 1978-1984 were published in table 12.1 of the 1985 CSO publication "United Kingdom Balance of Payments" (the Pink Book). Figures for transactions with individual countries, including the US, are available only in respect of direct investment (other than by oil companies) and are published in tables 3.1 (outward) (as amended) and 4.1 (inward) of the 1983 HMSO "Business Monitor MA4, Overseas Transactions". Both publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Tax Investigations

Mr. Hickmet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise inspectors carry out in-depth investigations into the tax affairs of companies, businesses or schedule D taxpayers;

(2) how many companies went into liquidation, businesses ceased trading and schedule D taxpayers were declared bankrupt following in-depth Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise investigation, stating what proportion that was of those companies, and so on assessed for further tax in each of the years since 1979;

(3) how many in-depth investigations into companies, businesses and schedule D taxpayers the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise have carried out where they have gone back up to 10 years for each of the years since 1979 to date; and how many such investigations revealed that further tax was payable giving the total figures involved in each year;

(4) how many companies, businesses and schedule D taxpayers following an in-depth investigation by the Customs and Excise or Inland Revenue were given the choice to pay a lesser sum over a period of time or contest the full sum before the commissioners, giving the sums involved;

(5) why, in in-depth investigations by the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, the onus is placed on the taxpayer to show that further tax is not payable;

(6) what administrative directions set out how the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise exercise their

powers to carry out in-depth investigations into the tax affairs of companies, businesses and individuals paying tax under schedule D, after audited accounts have been submitted; and if he will state up to how far back such investigations normally go;

(7) what proportion of directors of companies or businesses or schedule D taxpayers who were assessed as liable to pay further tax after an in-depth investigation used professional legal or accountants' assistance in their dealings with the Inland Revenue at the time of agreeing to pay further tax.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Sinsemilla

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to facilitate the detection and to prevent the importation into the United Kingdom of the drug Sinsemilla; what quantities of the drug have so far been impounded at ports of entry; how many people have been found to have the drug in their possession on entering the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The importation of Sinsemilla, a term describing a seedless cannabis plant, is prohibited under Section 3(1) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise enforce this prohibition as for all other prohibited drugs. The detection, prevention and investigation of drug smuggling is a top priority of the Board of Customs and Excise.

Separate records of Sinsemilla seizures are not kept because it is a form of herbal cannabis.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Poland (Foreign Debt)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Polish Government concerning proposals for the rescheduling of its foreign debts.

Mr. Renton: Proposals for the rescheduling of Polish foreign debts are considered by official creditors on a multilateral basis. Agreements were reached last year on restructuring official debts falling due in the period from 1982 to 1985. Discussions continue on future rescheduling arrangements. The United Kingdom signed a bilateral rescheduling agreement with Poland on 30 November 1985 covering debts falling due in the period 1982-84.

UNESCO

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with his partners in the Council of Ministers of the European Community before the United Kingdom left the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; and what views they put to him.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend had no formal collective discussions about UNESCO with Community colleagues in the period immediately preceding our decision not to rescind our notice of withdrawal from the organisation.

However, there were exchanges at official level and some colleagues sent messages to express the hope that Britain would remain within the organisation to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) to Hong Kong.

Mr. Renton: I paid a brief visit to Hong Kong on 23 and 24 January following my visit to China between 18 and 23 January. During my stopover in Hong Kong I held useful discussions with the Governor, the Executive Council and the Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the People's Republic of China has made any objections concerning further democratic reform in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: There will be a review of the further development of representative government in Hong Kong in 1987. Decisions on any further developments must await the outcome of that review. The Joint Liaison Group discussed recent changes in Hong Kong's political system at the group's second meeting between 26 and 29 November 1985. The group's proceedings are confidential, but the atmosphere of the discussions was friendly and co-operative.

Philippines

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on relations with the Philippines following the recent elections;

(2) what arrangements Her Majesty's Government have made to obtain information about the conduct of the recent election in the Philippines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We attach importance to our relations with the Philippines, as a member of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and a country of considerable strategic importance. Together with our European Community partners, we expressed the hope that the election would be held in accordance with the law and the constitution. The situation is still very confused, but we are concerned at the widespread allegations of electoral fraud.

East Germany (Compensation for British Citizens)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he has made in negotiating with the East German Government compensation for British citizens whose property was appropriated by the Nazis prior to 1945.

Mr. Eggar: We held a plenary session of talks about these claims which arise mainly for the period post 8 May 1945 with the German Democratic Republic in London in March 1985. Good progress was made at that meeting and a programme of work was agreed to help speed up the

remainder of the negotiation. Most of that work is now well in hand. We hope to hold further meetings with the German Democratic Republic this year.

South Atlantic Islands Development Corporation Limited

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *369*, what further information he has as to the nature and the directors of the two European legal entities referred to in that answer.

Mr. Eggar: None.

ENVIRONMENT

Community Programme

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what underspend is anticipated in urban aid community programme aid in 1985-86; how much he expects Bradford to be offered in additional community programme funds; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 18 October 1985 that authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside would receive £2·25 million out of an extra £15 million which was being allocated to inner-city authorities in England. Bradford subsequently made a bid for some of those additional resources but key information about the proposed schemes is still awaited. The amount to be offered will depend upon the quality of the projects submitted and the city council's ability to use extra capital resources before the end of the current financial year.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the rate support grant paid or to be paid to Stockport metropolitan district council in each of the years from 1976-77 to 1986-87, inclusive, in real terms.

Mrs. Rumbold: The rate support grant figures for the metropolitan district of Stockport are shown below in constant 1984-85 prices:

(1) 1976-77 to 1980-81

	£ million (1984-85 prices)
1976-77	80·2
1977-78	73·9
1978-79	72·1
1979-80	66·6
1980-81	65·4

(2) 1981-82 to 1986-87

	£ million (1984-85 prices)
1981-82	51·8
1982-83	47·2
1983-84	45·7
1984-85	43·7
1985-86	39·1
1986-87	*(42·6)

* Settlement estimate.

The figures for 1976-77 to 1980-81 are not comparable with those for 1981-82 to 1986-87 because:

(i) they comprise the needs, resources and domestic elements whereas from 1981-82 onwards the figures comprise block grant and domestic rate relief grant;

(ii) grant in support of services provided by metropolitan county councils was paid to the districts up to 1980-81 and to the counties thereafter.

The 1986-87 figure includes block grant in respect of responsibilities inherited from the Greater Manchester county council.

The figures for 1976-77 to 1982-83 are final entitlements; for 1983-84 and 1984-85, block grant entitlements are based on provisional outturn information; for 1985-86 and 1986-87 they are based respectively on the council's budget and the expenditure estimate used for the rate support grant settlement.

The figures have been expressed in constant prices by using the GDP deflator.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the rate support grant paid or payable to the London borough of Waltham Forest in each year from 1979-80 to 1986-87 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms expressed in 1979-80 prices.

Mrs. Rumbold: The rate support grant figures for the London borough of Waltham Forest are shown below:

	Cash £ million	*1979-80 Prices £ million*
(1) 1979-80 and 1980-81		
1979-80	46·7	46·7
1980-81	54·4	45·8
(2) 1981-82 to 1986-87		
1981-82	54·6	41·8
1982-83	61·0	43·7
1983-84	65·5	44·9
1984-85	64·8	42·6
1985-86	65·1	40·7
1986-87	(71·2)	*(42·6)

* Settlement estimate

The figures for 1979-80 and 1980-81 are not comparable with those for 1981-82 to 1986-87 because they comprise the needs, resources and domestic elements whereas from 1981-82 onwards the figures comprise block grant and domestic rate relief grant.

There were other changes which affect the figures for 1981-82 onwards, making meaningful comparisons difficult. Until 1981-82, grant in support of GLC and Metropolitan police expenditure was paid to London boroughs; in 1982-83 this was still the case for Metropolitan police but GLC grant was paid direct; from 1983-84 grant was paid direct to both the GLC and the Metropolitan police.

The 1986-87 figures includes block grant in respect of responsibilities inherited from the GLC.

The figures for 1979-80 to 1982-83 are final entitlements; for 1983-84 and 1984-85, block grant entitlements are based on provisional outturn information; for 1985-86 and 1986-87 they are based respectively on the council's budget and the expenditure estimate used for the rate support grant settlement.

The cash figures have been converted to 1979-80 prices by using the GDP deflator.

Water Supplies

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on what research is being carried out by the water research centre into the increasing discoloration of water supplies in certain parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: As the causes of discoloration are known, no research is being carried out on this by the water research centre. However, the Yorkshire water authority — studying what particular factors may have given rise to recent increases in discoloration in their area. Improved methods for removing colour from water are being developed, for example, by the Yorkshire water authority, which is installing a pilot plant using a novel process to treat highly coloured, soft water. Its performance will be monitored and evaluated by the water research centre.

Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Houses

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date his Department received a reply from Birmingham city council to the circular letter from his Department to local authorities of 18 February 1983 concerning prefabricated reinforced concrete houses.

Sir George Young: Birmingham city council first responded to my Department's letter on 11 May 1983. The information it supplied was amended and updated in subsequent letters of 9 June 1983 and 10 December 1984. I understand that the matter is still being pursued and that further information will be forwarded in due course.

Recycled Paper

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the total paper used annually by his Department is recycled paper; and what savings the use of this paper represents in cash terms and as a proportion of the total expenditure on paper by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: A total of 11 tonnes of recycled paper has been ordered for letter-headed notepaper and matching envelopes and about half has been distributed. Figures for total paper consumption are not readily available and percentages and costs cannot be given.

Annual savings in cash terms are currently in the region of £5,500.

Water and Sewerage Law

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what date he received the working party report on water and sewerage law;

(2) which association or bodies were represented on the working party on water and sewerage law;

(3) when he expects to make a statement on his policy towards the conclusion of the working party report on water and sewerage law.

Mr. John Patten: The working party comprised officials from my Department, members of the water industry nominated by the Water Authorities Association and the Water Companies Association, and one outside member with local authority experience. I received a report on their findings on 19 December. As mentioned in the White Paper "Privatisation of the Water Authorities in England and Wales" (Cmnd. 9734), a consultation paper on the Government's proposals for reform of the law will be published shortly.

Defective Housing

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in finding an approved method of repair for Reema and Tarran pre-cast concrete houses under the Housing Defects Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I understand that a repair system for Reema houses is now being appraised by PRC Homes Ltd. and that a repair system for Tarran houses is to be submitted for appraisal shortly. Individual local authorities may have already accepted repair methods for these types outside the PRC Homes Ltd. scheme, but information on this is not available.

Grants

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the urban development grant projects approved by his Department during 1985, stating for each project the total amount of grant, the percentage the grant comprised, the total cost of the project, the name of the public or private sector participants within each project, and the cost from public funds for each new job created within each project.

Sir George Young: Lists of all projects approved for urban development grant are regularly placed in the Library of the House; an updated version was placed there last month. These contain for each project the total amount of grant, the private sector investment, the names of the sponsoring local authority and of the private sector participant, and a brief description of the project. It is not the practice to release further details of individual schemes. Fifty-seven projects were approved in the calendar year 1985; these involved total investment of £127 million brought about by £27 million of urban development grant and other public funds.

The average estimated public expenditure per new job to be created in commercial and industrial schemes approved in 1985 is £5,300; this ignores jobs retained and other benefits, such as derelict land reclaimed.

Animal Furs

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department has taken to control or prohibit the import of animal furs on conservation grounds.

Mr. Waldegrave: Imports of animal furs from endangered species are controlled under the 1982 European Council Regulation (3626(82)) which implements the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, and under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976.

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Mr. Woodcock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will agree to the transfer of the Liverpool philharmonic hall to a charitable trust adequately funded; and if he will seek the support of the local authorities in providing that funding.

Mr. Tracey: I will answer this question shortly.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to promulgate the terms for compensation for financial detriment to Greater London council staff who take up employment with successor authorities at a lower rate of remuneration as a result of the abolition of the Greater London council on 31 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 13 November 1985 at column *167*. The regulations giving effect to the government's decisions on compensation for redundancy and financial detriment to staff affected by the Local Government Act 1985 were laid before Parliament on 7 February. My Department is sending copies of the regulations, together with explanatory notes, to all the local authorities affected and to other interested parties. I am arranging for copies of the notes to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *51*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent under section 7 of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act for a grant to the Asha Women's Group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Consent to this grant was refused on 5 February.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *52*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent for Hounslow West station car park; and if he will make a statement;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *141*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to funding for Wyke House hostel, Weymouth, Dorset; and if he will make a statement;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *341*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to the disposal of Wilton's music hall, Graces alley, London E1; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Consent has been given to these applications.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *52*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to a grant to the Polytechnic of Central London for a study of decentralisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Consent to this application has been refused.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *141*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to the upgrading of computers for the welfare benefits project.

Mr. Tracey: Consent to this application, and to others from the Greater London council involving expenditure totalling £3·444 million in connection with the council's welfare benefits project, has today been refused.

The Government have recognised the value of past efforts to encourage the take-up of welfare benefit. Nonetheless, decisions on the future of this project are best left to the borough councils with whom statutory responsibility for local social services lies.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *341*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to the disposal of Kings Reach, Stamford wharf, wall and walk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *341*, when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to the disposal of 50-52 King street, Southall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Consent to this application has today been refused.

The council sought consent to acquire a new 15-year lease on these premises and to grant a lease to Southall police monitoring group at a peppercorn rent. Such an arrangement would impose financial liabilities upon the council's successors and their ratepayers without any regard to their wishes.

Mr. Shore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated rate support grant payment to the London borough of Tower Hamlets for 1986-87; and how much of this sum is payment in lieu of services formerly provided by the Greater London council.

Mr. Waldegrave: If the London borough of Tower Hamlets budgets in line with our settlement assumption of £120·208 million, which is about 3·5 per cent. higher than its budget for 1985-86, it will receive £71·184 million in block grant, including payments from the London rate equalisation scheme of just over £10 million. Domestic rate relief grant will be £2·971 million and the estimated total of RSG will therefore be £74·155 million. This is about £46·8 million higher than the current entitlement for 1985-86, of which about £42 million is due to the abolition of the GLC.

District Heating (Newcastle)

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the Byker district heating scheme in Newcastle upon Tyne; and what discussions he has had with the local authority concerning the scheme.

Sir George Young: My Department has some information on the Byker district heating scheme resulting from a study commissioned by the Building Research

Establishment in the middle of last year. We have had no recent discussions with the local authority concerning the scheme.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if increased expenditure by local authorities as a result of the introduction of GCSEs will be subject to rate penalties.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Education's answer to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 28 January 1986, at column 435. If a local authority chooses to increase its expenditure, the normal grant rules will apply.

"Faith in the City"

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his recent discussions with the Archbishop of Canterbury and other leaders of the Church of England on the subject of the report of the Archbishop's commission "Faith in the City"; and what further plans he has for future meetings on the subject.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I met the Archbishop of Canterbury on 28 January to discuss the report of his commission on urban priority areas — "Faith in the City". I welcomed the commission's report as a constructive analysis of the challenges facing Church and state in urban areas. We did not have a detailed discussion of all the many recommendations in the report, but agreed that, while there might be differences on some parts of the analysis and some of the remedies, there was close understanding on many of the main issues. In particular, we agreed that we must find ways to involve the people living in the cities in creating the sorts of communities and environments in the areas in which they want to live and work. I offered the assistance of my Department in following up the work of the commission in identifying areas suitable for neighbourhood action, and in exploring the potential for joint action through Government initiatives and the proposed Church urban fund.

Superstore (Slough)

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his decision on the planning application in respect of the proposed superstore development at Cippenham in Slough.

Mr. Tracey: An announcement will be made within the next few days.

SCOTLAND

Security Firms

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation to licence security firms operating in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: No. The Government's policy on this matter was outlined in the reply which my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 20 January at column 10.

Grants

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the urban development grant projects approved by his Department during 1985, stating for each project the total amount of grant, the percentage the grant comprised, the total cost of the project, the name of the public or private sector participants within each project, and the cost from public funds for each new job created within each project.

Mr. Ancram: Urban development grant is available only in England and Wales. In Scotland, the Scottish Development Agency operates an analogous local enterprise grants for urban project—LEG-UP—scheme, under which financial assistance is given normally on the basis that part or all of the support from public funds should be repaid in due course.

For reasons of commercial confidentiality it is not our practice to provide information on individual projects in the precise form requested. I have, however, arranged for a list of projects approved in principle in 1985 to be placed in the Library.

In total, offers of asistance amounting to some £6·9 million were approved in 1985, representing 18·3 per cent. of the estimated total cost of supported projects. The estimated cost from public funds per new job expected to be created in all commercial and industrial projects is £3,600. This assumes that all the approved assistance is taken up and none repaid, and excludes from consideration any jobs retained or construction jobs created.

Council House Sales

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many homes in Scotland formerly owned by the public sector had been sold to private owners by 31 December 1985; and of these how many were sold in the year ended 31 December 1985.

Mr. Rifkind: Some 77,000 homes formerly owned by housing authorities have been sold to sitting tenants and to other private individuals during the period 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1985. Of these some 10,700 were sold between 1 January and 30 September 1985. The information available to the Department for the final quarter of 1985 is still incomplete.

Housing Associations

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what sum has been paid by his Department to support housing associations in each of the last six years for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Housing Act 1974			Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968		Finance Act 1965	Total
	Housing Association Grant	Revenue Deficit Grant	Hostel Deficit Grant	Claims under Section 9	Section 10	Corporation Tax Grant	
1979-80	35,527,847	482,255	348,689	—	24,136	81,982	36,464,909
1980-81	50,602,731	1,202,262	116,289	—	20,208	62,948	52,004,438
1981-82	82,417,509	1,305,949	59,767	—	54,996	61,740	83,899,961
1982-83	104,176,001	1,023,628	131,447	222	10,762	108,949	105,451,009
1983-84	115,749,586	542,314	181,101	180	712	318,450	116,792,343
1984-85	127,678,262	283,858	122,074	480	8,141	405,297	128,498,112

In addition grants totalling £10,000 were paid during the period 1979-85 under the urban aid programme. Further details are not available.

Housing association grant is a capital grant paid on the completion of projects. The figures include payments made under the subsidy arrangements in force prior to the introduction of HAG.

Revenue and hostel deficit grants have been paid to offset associations' eligible revenue deficits; while certain specialist associations have had the costs of staff training assisted under section 9, and other activities under section 10, of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The tax grants were paid to offset associations' liability for corporation tax.

Housing

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of local authority revenue budget has been made up of housing support grant in each of the last six years for which figures are available.

Mr. Rifkind: For each year since 1980-81, the percentage of district and islands councils' housing revenue account budgets made up of housing support grant is as follows:

	Per cent.
1980-81	37
1981-82	25
1982-83	16
1983-84	11
1984-85	9
1985-86	7

Sources:

1980-81—1984-85. Local authority returns to Scottish Development Department.

1985-86—Rating Review (August 1985), published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, Scottish Branch.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of total housing resource allowance paid to Scottish local authorities in each of the last six years for which figures are available was paid in the form of housing support grant.

Mr. Rifkind: In addition to housing support grant, central government payments to local authorities for housing purposes include Exchequer contributions towards improvement and repair grants and environmental improvements, payments to match local authorities' expenditure on homes insulation grants, and grants for the provision of sites for travelling people. The following table shows housing support grant as a percentage of these total payments.

	Per cent.
1980-81	93·9
1981-82	90·0
1982-83	82·8
1983-84	63·8
1984-85	55·0
1985-86*	49·5

* Figure for 1985-86 is an estimate and includes housing support grant payable to authorities in terms of the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation Order 1986, laid before the House on 13 January 1986.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many homes in Scotland were defined as being in sub-tolerable standard in *(a)* at the most recent date for which figures are available, *(b)* in 1966 and *(c)* in 1976.

Mr. Rifkind: Estimates based on local authority returns of the numbers of dwellings in Scotland below the tolerable standard in 1968, 1976 and 1985 are shown in the table. Figures for 1966 are not available.

Estimates number of dwellings below the tolerable standard

Year	Number
December 1968	250,000
December 1976	156,000
March 1985	63,000

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure of the Highlands and Islands Development Board in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what percentage of that expenditure has been met from *(a)* Government grant and *(b)* profit released on investments made by the Highlands and Islands Development Board in each of these years.

Mr. Rifkind: The gross expenditure and the proportion met from grant-in-aid is as follows:

Year	Gross expenditure £ million	Proportion met from grant-in-aid Per cent.
1980-81	23·7	84
1981-82	27·3	84
1982-83	32·7	84
1983-84	38·1	82
1984-85	42·1	82

The other information is not available in the form requested. The balance of the board's expenditure in each year has been met from receipts comprising loan interest and capital repayments, dividends from shares, rent, and the proceeds from the sale of assets.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if any guidelines are issued by his Department

concerning the distribution of profits made by the Highlands and Islands Development Board from investments realised during the course of a financial year; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether his Department has insisted on the return of profits made by the Highlands and Islands Development Board in any year since the board's inception; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 7 February 1986 to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Education at column 275.

Hypothermia

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Dundee, East of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns 549-50, he will give figures for deaths from hypothermia for the years 1981, 1982 and 1983, respectively, broken down by age group and month of the year.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is as follows:

Deaths with any mention of hypothermia, by age group and month, Scotland

	Under 25	*25-34*	*35-44*	*45-54*	*55-64*	*65-74*	*75-84*	*85+*	*Total*
1981									
January	5	—	1	3	5	10	18	11	53
February	—	—	—	1	3	10	10	5	29
March	1	—	—	1	4	6	10	2	24
April	—	—	—	—	3	5	4	1	13
May	—	—	—	1	—	1	4	1	7
June	1	—	—	—	1	—	3	4	9
July	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
August	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
September	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	3
October	—	—	—	1	2	5	5	5	18
November	—	—	—	2	—	3	4	2	11
December	1	5	1	5	8	22	27	16	85
Total	8	5	2	14	26	65	87	47	254
1982									
January	1	1	1	2	6	21	26	12	70
February	—	—	—	—	3	4	14	5	26
March	—	1	—	2	1	3	5	7	19
April	—	—	—	1	—	1	2	1	5
May	—	1	—	1	2	4	—	2	10
June	1	—	—	—	1	2	3	2	9
July	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
August	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	3
September	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
October	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	—	4
November	—	—	—	1	1	3	6	—	11
December	—	—	2	—	2	10	15	8	37
Total	2	3	3	7	18	52	73	38	196
1983									
January	2	1	1	1	5	5	4	7	26
February	1	—	—	5	—	7	16	9	38
March	—	—	—	—	4	4	5	5	18
April	—	—	1	2	1	4	7	4	19
May	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	4	7
June	—	—	—	2	1	—	2	3	8
July	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	1	3
August	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	3
September	—	—	—	1	—	4	5	—	10
October	—	—	—	1	1	4	4	3	13
November	1	—	—	1	1	2	4	2	11
December	1	—	—	2	2	5	9	4	23
Total	5	2	2	15	16	35	60	44	179

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the statutory and non-statutory bodies to which the Countryside Commission for Scotland's recent draft forestry policy document has been given.

Mr. Ancram: The consultation undertaken by the Countryside Commission for Scotland in relation to its draft forestry policy document is a matter for decision by the commission without reference to my right hon. and learned Friend. I am, therefore, asking the chairman of the commission to write to the hon. Member on the matter as soon as possible.

EMPLOYMENT

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Paymaster General if former Greater London council staff made redundant as a result of the abolition of the council on 31 March will be able to claim unemployment benefit even if they are not provided with redundancy notices by the London Residuary Body on that date.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The absence of a redundancy notice will not prevent staff made redundant from claiming unemployment benefit. Any claims made will be decided by independent adjudicating authorities. Statutory redundancy payments do not affect entitlement to unemployment benefit but the authorities will have to consider, among other issues, whether or not any payments described as redundancy payments include wages in lieu of notice, since unemployment benefit cannot be paid in addition to wages.

Youth Wages

Mr. Haynes asked the Paymaster General what evidence he has of the extent of the correlation between the level of youth wages and the level of unemployment.

Mr. Lang: There have been a number of studies in recent years which indicate that the employment prospects of young people have been adversely affected by high level of earnings relative to adults. These include:

Hart P. E.—"Youth unemployment and relative wages in the United Kingdom. A survey of recent econometric evidence". NIESR discussion Paper No. 70.

Merrilees W. and Wilson R. — "Disequilibrium in the labour market for young people in Great Britain". Warwick University, Manpower Research Group Discussion Paper No. 10.

OECD — "Do relative wage levels affect youth employment" Chapter V, OECD "Employment Outlook" 1984.

Rice P. — "Juvenile unemployment, relative wages and social security in Great Britain". University of Sussex, Department of Economics (Mimeo) 1984.

Wells W. —"The relative pay and employment of young people". DE Research Paper No. 42.

East Midlands

Mr. Leigh asked the Paymaster General how much Manpower Services Commission money is currently spent in the east midlands.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In the period 1 April to 31 December 1985, the Manpower Services Commission spent £67,119,000 directly through its accounts offices in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. This includes administration costs and expenditure on the community programme which is administered by the Manpower Services Commission on behalf of the Government. There was additional expenditure in these areas on programmes funded centrally by the Manpower Services Commission but the sums involved could only be identified at disproportionate cost.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Bellingham asked the Paymaster General what steps he plans to take to better publicise the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Trippier: The Manpower Services Commission launched a national marketing campaign on 13 January to increase the awareness amongst unemployed people about the enterprise allowance scheme. The campaign will use both national and regional advertising and will last until March 1987.

Mr. Alton asked the Paymaster General how many people in total have been assisted by the enterprise allowance scheme in the north-west.

Mr. Trippier: The total number of entrants to the enterprise allowance scheme in the north-west region at 31 December 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, is 23,510.

Sheltered Employment Schemes

Mr. Irving asked the Paymaster General what is the average weekly remuneration for those employed in *(a)* sheltered workshops and *(b)* sheltered industrial group schemes at the latest convenient date.

Mr. Lang: I regret that the information in the form requested is not available. I shall be writing to my hon. Friend to explain the position.

Mr. Irving asked the Paymaster General how many places are available in *(a)* sheltered workshops and *(b)* sheltered industrial group schemes in England and Wales; and what proportion of these places is filled by mentally ill people at the latest convenient date.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is given in the following table:

	Remploy (31 September 1985	*Sheltered Workshops (31 March 1985)*	**Sheltered Placements (31 December 1985)*
Employees in England and Wales	7,842	4,573	1,537
Total employees in Great Britain	8,916	5,554	1,663
Proportion who are mentally ill and mentally handicapped in Great Britain	21%	†	48%
Of which mentally ill	7%	†	6%

* Formerly Sheltered Industrial Groups.

† Firm information is not available about the proportions in sheltered workshops but the Manpower Services Commission believes that they are likely to be broadly in line with the proportions employed by Remploy Limited.

Licensing Systems (Review)

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Paymaster General what progress has been made in taking forward the recommendation in the White Paper, "Lifting the Burden" Cmnd. 9571, to review the effect on business of the wide variety of different licensing systems.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The enterprise and deregulation unit has today written to business organisations, local authority associations and others to seek their views on the extent and the nature of the burdens placed on businesses and enforcing authorities as a result of the licensing requirements imposed by central government. We are inviting views by 19 March. A second stage of the review, which the Unit will discuss in advance with local authority

associations, will examine those licensing requirements imposed by local government and the burdens imposed by local Acts of Parliament.

Payment of Bills

Mr. Wallace asked the Paymaster General whether he has any plans to institute a code of practice on late payment of bills to small firms.

Mr. Trippier: I intend to publish practical guidance prepared in conjunction with industry representatives on this subject. Its aim will be to help purchasing and supplying organisations to ensure that bills are paid on time.

Unemployed Persons

Mr. Freeman asked the Paymaster General what recent research he has commissioned into the willingness and ability of those temporarily unemployed to find work outside their existing travel-to-work area.

Mr. Lang: I have commissioned no recent research of this kind. The Manpower Services Commission has conducted a number of internal evaluations of schemes, such as the employment transfer scheme, whose aim is to improve geographical labour mobility.

Racial Discrimination

Mr. Dubs asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the nature and extent of racial discrimination in employment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Research studies over recent years have shown that the ethnic minorities in Britain continue to suffer racial discrimination in employment. The Policy Studies Institute report "Racial Discrimination —17 Years After the Act" published in 1985 concluded that racial discrimination in employment remained as common as it was a decade ago with at least a third of employers discriminating against black job seekers. The PSI publication "Black and White Britain" published in 1984 showed that people of Asian and West Indian origin at work tended to have jobs with lower pay and lower status than those of white workers. The 1984 labour force survey showed that unemployment rates were generally much higher for the ethnic minorities than whites with similar characteristics such as age group and level of qualification. These findings reinforce the Government's commitment to the removal of racial discrimination and the promotion of effective equal opportunities in employment regardless of race.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* travel-to-work areas with an unemployment rate of 8 per cent. or less and the number of unemployed persons registered at each jobcentre in such areas.

Mr. Lang: The following table shows those travel-to-work areas which, on 9 January 1986, had an unemployment rate of 8 per cent. or less. Jobcentre boundaries do not coincide with travel-to-work areas; moreover registrants at jobcentres do not distinguish the unemployed from employed people seeking a change of employment.

Unemployment rates for travel-to-work areas—January 1986

Travel-to-work area	*Unemployment rate—per cent.*
Winchester and Eastleigh	5·5
Crawley	5·9
Clitheroe	6·0
Aylesbury and Wycombe	6·5
Basingstoke and Alton	6·6
Aberdeen	6·7
Shetland Islands	6·8
Cambridge	6·9
Guildford and Aldershot	6·9
Slough	7·1
Tunbridge Wells	7·3
Bury St. Edmunds	7·4
Heathrow	7·7
Oxford	7·9
Malton	8·0
Reading	8·0

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General how many unemployed persons have been registered voluntarily at jobcentres *(a)* for up to three months, *(b)* for between three and six months and *(c)* for more than six months at the latest available date.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available. Analysis of registrations at jobcentres by duration is not carried out. Moreover figures of registrants at jobcentres do not distinguish the unemployed from employed people seeking a change of employment.

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General if he will list in the *Official Report* those travel-to-work areas in which his Department has identified a significant shortage of skilled labour.

Mr. Trippier: My Department does not collect information identifying significant shortages of skilled labour. The Manpower Services Commission does conduct a survey of those vacancies at jobcentres that have remained unfilled for more than two months. The results provide an indication of areas of skill shortage both geographically and by occupation. The latest survey was completed in September 1985 and I will write to my hon. Friend again shortly when results by travel-to-work area have been prepared.

Mr. Alton asked the Paymaster General whether information on the previous occupation of the unemployed, their skill levels and their potential for skill upgrading is made available to the Manpower Services Commission and to local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Information on the previous occupation for the unemployed has not been available from the claimant count since October 1982. However the annual labour force survey collects information on the previous occupation of people looking for work who have been out of employment for less than three years but only at regional and national level. This information is made available to the Manpower Services Commission. It is also available to the local education authorities on request.

The survey does not provide information on skills levels or the potential for skills upgrading for the unemployed, and my Department has no other information on these topics at the present time.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Paymaster General if he will list by postal code areas the numbers of *(a)* men and *(b)* women unemployed in the York constituency for 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 in January of each year.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available. Postal code areas cannot readily be linked to constituencies, which are defined in terms of wards. However, figures for local authority wards from June 1983 are available in the Library.

Regional Manpower Strategy

Mr. Alton asked the Paymaster General whether there is a regional manpower strategy formulated between the Manpower Services Commission and his Department for each region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: MSC regional directors and employment managers formulate training and employment plans for their region in line with the overall strategy in the MSC corporate plan, which is approved by the Secretary of State. I am satisfied with these arrangements.

Local Economic Initiatives

Mr. Alton asked the Paymaster General what framework there is for consultation between local authorities and his Department concerning the development of local economic initiatives.

Mr. Clarke: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Wages

Mr. Nellist asked the Paymaster General by what percentage boys' and girls' wages have changed relative to adult wages since May 1979.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply on 29 October 1985, at column 405, which gives the latest available information.

EC (Employment Statistics)

Mr. Shore asked the Paymaster General how many United Kingdom nationals were, at the latest convenient date, in full-time employment in the countries of the EEC, excluding Spain and Portugal.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is given in the following table, at the latest available date for each country. There is no information on the numbers in full-time as opposed to part-time employment.

United Kingdom nationals: Employees in employment in other EC countries

	Thousand	*Year*
Germany (FR)	30·4	1983
France	13·9	1982
Italy	1·0	1983
Netherlands	15·1	1982
Belgium	6·8	1981
Luxembourg	1·0	1981
Ireland	13·2	1979
Denmark	4·2	1983
Greece	3·2	1982

Source: Statistical Office of the European Communities, 'Employment and Unemployment 1985'.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Paymaster General if the draft parental leave directive falls within the area of jurisdiction to which majority voting will apply following the signature of the Single European Act on 17 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: European proposals relating to the rights and interests of employed persons, which include the fraft directive on parental leave, will continue to require unanimous agreement in the Council of Ministers.

The Government continue to oppose the draft directive on parental leave. We believe that the matters with which it deals are best dealt with between employers and employees according to their priorities, needs, circumstances and what they can afford. We see no case for a regulation on the issue imposing identical arrangements on all businesses in all sectors of industry. We have pointed out, in the European Council, that implementation of the directive would add to employers' costs and increase the administrative burdens on them, thereby damaging the prospects of growth in employment for men and women.

Radar Equipment (Accidents)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Paymaster General how many accidents have occurred as a result of work with radar equipment in each year since 1980.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Visual Display Units (Accidents)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Paymaster General how many accidents have occurred as a result of work with (i) visual display units or (ii) cathode ray tubes in each year since 1980.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Skilled Workers

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Paymaster General what representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry about the shortage of skilled workers; and what steps he has taken to encourage more firms to employ apprentices in engineering and other industries.

Mr. Trippier: My ministerial colleagues and I are in regular contact with the Confederation of British Industry about a wide range of issues. We have not received any direct representations from the confederation specifically in respect of skill shortages.

Employers have the prime responsibility for ensuring that they recruit the number of apprentices which they will need in order to meet their future requirements for skilled workers. The Government make a significant contribution through YTS funding which already enables a substantial amount of initial skills training to be carried out. This financial support will be increased from April, when YTS is extended from one to two years.

Community Industry Scheme

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Paymaster General if he has any plans to harmonise the disposable incomes of young persons engaged in the community industry scheme, on the one hand, and on YTS in its proposed second year, on the other.

Mr. Lang: I have no present plans to do so.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Paymaster General if he is satisfied with the level of recruitment of young persons into the community industry scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Yes. In the last twelve months, 9,278 young employees have entered the scheme. During that time community industry maintained an occupancy rate of almost 97 per cent.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish in the *Official Report* in tabular form for each of the past five parliamentary Sessions, and for the current Session to date *(a)* the number of days that the House of Commons sat, *(b)* the total number of hours sat, *(c)* the average daily hours of sitting, *(d)* the longest time of any one sitting, *(e)* the number of parliamentary questions (i) oral and (ii) written and *(f)* the number of divisions.

Mr. Biffen: The information requested is as follows:

	Session 1980-81	*Session 1981-82*	*Session 1982-83*	*Session 1983-84*	*Session 1984-85*	*Session 1985-86 to 31 January 1986*
Number of days House sat	163	174	115	213	172	48
Total number of hours sat	1,485 hrs 11 mins	1,534 hrs 13 mins	984 hrs 50 mins	1,914 hrs 33 mins	1,566 hrs 17 mins	418 hrs 28 mins
Average daily hours of sitting	9 hrs 7 mins	8 hrs 48 mins	8 hrs 34 mins	8 hrs 59 mins	9 hrs 6 nins	8 hrs 42 mins
Longest time of any one sitting	25 hrs (1 April 1981)	18 hrs 57 mins (21 December 1981)	18 hrs 51 mins (7 February 1983)	32 hrs 13 mins (22 May 1984)	30 hrs 14 mins (5 March 1985)	18 hrs 57 mins (18 December 1985)
Number of parliamentary questions:						
Oral	8,175	8,991	6,125	13,386	14,800	4,270
Written	22,688	23,439	17,095	40,119	31,523	9,114
Number of divisions	317	332	146	482	307	57

Select Committee on Procedure

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish in the *Official Report* those recommendations from the Procedure Committee that have been implemented since 1956; and what was the date of each such implementation.

Mr. Biffen: The information is not readily available. I shall, however, write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of reports issued by Procedure Committees for each Session since 1956.

Mr. Biffen: The information is as follows:

Select Committee on Procedure: Reports 1956-to date

Subject or title	*House of Commons Paper No.*
1956-57	
First i. Amendments on going into Committee of Supply on Navy, Army and Air Estimates; and on Civil Estimates	110
ii. Money Resolutions etc.	
Second i. Quorum of and closure in standing committee	211
ii. Scottish Standing Committee: reference of S.I.s, and constitution.	
1957-58	
Special: Inquiry not completed	262
1958-59	
Report: Legislation, Private Members' bills, Private bills, Morning sittings, Debate, Adjournment debates, Questions, Supply, Committees, Miscellaneous	92
1961-62	
Report: "Effect of S.O. No. 58(2) on Minorities"	236
1962-63	
First: "The rule relating to reference in the House of Commons to matters considered as Sub Judice"	156
Second: "Expediting the Finance Bill"	190
1963-64	
First: "The Form of the Defence Estimates"	248
Second: "The disclosure of matters contained in the reports of select committees"	295
Third: Allocation of time to bills; the method of signifying objection at the time of Unopposed Business	306
1964-65	
First: Second reading committees; ten-minute rule bills	149

Subject or title	House of Commons Paper No.
Second: "Question Time"	188
Third: Expediting the Finance Bill	276
Fourth: Examination of Estimates	303
Fifth: "Voting arrangements for Sick Members"	361
1965-66	
Report: "Financial Procedure"	122
1966-67	
First: "The Times of Sittings of the House"	153
Second: "Standing Order No. 9; urgent and topical debates"	282
Third: "Methods of voting"	283
Fourth: "The Finance Bill"	382
Fifth: "Questions"	410
Sixth: "Public Bill Procedure, etc."	539
1967-68	
Report: "The Dates of the Session; the Financial Year"	356
1968-69	
Special: Progress in public expenditure inquiry	51
First: "Scrutiny of Public Expenditure and Administration"	410
Second: "Form of the Defence Estimates"	411
1969-70	
First Special: Announcement of taxation inquiry	123
Second Special: Inquiry not complete	302
First: "Ten-minute rule motions"	141
Second: "Question Time"	198
1970-71	
First Special: Future inquiries	186
First: "Scrutiny of taxation"	276
Second: "The Process of Legislation"	538
1971-72	
First Special: Announcement of inquiries	36
Second Special: Announcement of sub judice inquiry	253
Third Special: Need for inquiry into procedural consequences of entry into European Communities	448
Fourth Special: Scrutiny of Taxation	449
Fifth Special: Timing of the Budget Statement—inquiry	513
First: "Election of a Speaker"	111
Second: "Debates on Consolidated Fund bills; Ministerial Statements"	217
Third: "Rights of Members to attend meetings of Select Committees"	270
Fourth: "Matters sub judice"	298
Fifth: "Lords Amendments to the National Health Service (Family Planning) Amendment Bill	385
Sixth: "Time of opposed private business"	512
1972-73	
First: "Timing of the Budget Statement"	152
Second: "Powers of Chairmen of Standing Committees; Public Petitions"	202
Third: "Debates on Defence"	257
Fourth: "Introduction of New Members after By-Elections"	336
Fifth: "Deferment of Private Members' Bills"	348
Sixth: "Members' Constituency Interests and Select Committee Inquiries	381
1974-75	
Special: Seeking views of Members	103
First: "European Secondary Legislation"	294
Second: "Calling Amendments for Division at the end of debate"	372
Third: "Late sittings"	491
1975-76	
First Special: Inviting evidence	574

Subject or title	House of Commons Paper No.
Select Committee on Procedure (Sessional Committee)	
1975-76	
First: Order of Printing Questions	618
Second: "The Order of Precedence of Private Members' Bills"	712
Third: "Tabling of Questions and Access to the Table Office"	719
1976-77	
First: "Calling of Amendments for Division at end of debate"	141
Second: Points of order during divisions	152
Third: "Opposition motions in Supply"	200
Fourth: "Business of the House Motions"	247
Fifth: "Questions to the Prime Minister"	320
Sixth: "The operation of Standing Order No. 9"	422
Seventh: Members successful in Ballots	483
Eighth: Tabling of Amendments on the day of second reading	484
Select Committee on Procedure	
1977-78	
First: Bill procedure, committee system, hours of sitting etc.	588
1978-79	
First Special: Priorities in implementing proposals of HC 588 (1977-78)	267
Select Committee on Procedure (Supply)	
1980-81	
First Report: Supply Procedure	118
Select Committee on Procedure (Finance)	
1982-83	
First Report: Financial Procedure	370
Select Committee on Procedure	
1983-84	
First: "Short Speeches"	570
1984-85	
First: "Printing of Oral Questions to the Prime Minister"	298
Second: "Public Bill Procedure"	49
Third: "Questions lost when a sitting is broken"	396
Fourth: "Short Speeches"	623
1985-86	
First: "The Operation of Standing Order No. 10"	42

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Plant Closures

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give information on the number of United Kingdom plants which have closed down since the beginning of 1979 in the manner of his answer of Wednesday 6 June 1984 to the hon. Member for Coventry, North East; and what is the number of jobs that have been lost since 1979 in the plants in question.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The latest information available indicates that 742 foreign-owned manufacturing plants in the United Kingdom with more than 10 employees have closed since 1 January 1979.

Since the beginning of 1979 a total of 124,653 jobs have been lost in the closures of all foreign-owned manufacturing plants which employed more than 10 people.

Machine Tools

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the outcome of the continued monitoring referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Coventry, North East, 17 February 1983, *Official Report*, column 203, of the import penetration by Japanese machine tool builders of the computer numerically-controlled lathes and machining centres market.

Mr. Alan Clark: The position in terms of numbers is that for computer numerically-controlled lathes the Japanese share of the United Kingdom market has fallen since 1981-82 while the share of the United Kingdom has risen. For CNC machining centres the Japanese share of the market rose sharply between the late 1970s and 1981-83 and fell abruptly in 1984 while the share of the United Kingdom, having fallen, recovered in that year. I understand that discussion between the Japan Machine Tools Builders Association and the Machine Tool Trades Association about Japanese import penetration of the United Kingdom market have continued.

Beef and Cereals

Sir Adam Butler asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give *(a)* the total tonnage of cereals imported into the United Kingdom from sub-Saharan Africa in each of the last five years, *(b)* the total tonnage of cereals imported into the United Kingdom from Ethiopia in each of the last five years, *(c)* the total tonnage of cereal substitutes imported into the United Kingdom from sub-Saharan Africa in each of the last five years, *(d)* the total tonnage of cereal substitutes imported into the United Kingdom from Ethiopia in each of the last five years, and *(e)* the total tonnage of beef imported into the United Kingdom from Ethiopia in each of the last five years; and whether there are any plans for such imports in the current year.

Mr. Alan Clark: Any future imports are dependent on conditions of supply and demand. These imports would be at the discretion of individual traders, not Her Majesty's Government.

The information relating to past imports which can be supplied within limits of cost is as follows:

Weight million tons

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985 (Jan-Nov)*
(a) Cereals and cereal preparations from sub-Saharan Africa*	†655	‡975	‖494	¶2,941	•662
(b) Cereals and cereal preparations from Ethiopia	■	■	■	2	■
(c) Cereal substitutes from sub-Saharan Africa*	*	*	*	*	23,935
(d) Cereal substitutes from Ethiopia	*	*	*	*	■
(e) Beef from Ethiopia	■	■	■	■	■

Source: Data corresponding to SITC/R2 the following headings in the United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics—*(a)* and *(b)* Division 04, *(c)* and *(d)* items 054.81, 081.19, 081.21, 081.22, 081.39 (part) and 081.93 (part), and *(e)* Division 01 (part).

* Information relating to imports of cereal substitutes in 1981-84 cannot be supplied within limits of cost.
† Includes 475 million tons from Mali.
‡ Includes 786 million tons from Gambia.
‖ Includes 242 million tons from Kenya and 170 million tons from Niger.
¶ Includes 2,703 from Zambia.
• Includes 545 million tons from Mali.
■ Signifies nil trade.
* Sub-Saharan Africa excludes South Africa.

Computer Security

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will identify the advisers on matters of computer security referred to in the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's letter of 4 November 1985 to the hon. Member for Hammersmith.

Mr. Butcher: Our advisers are the Communications-Electronics Security Group which is part of GCHQ.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will identify and place in the Library the reports received by his Department on the risks of electromagnetic radiation to computer security.

Mr. Butcher: The most recent and publicly available report on this subject is "Electromagnetic Radiation from Video Display Units: An Eavesdropping Risk?" by Winn van Eck, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Export Controls

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library a full list of items, the export of which are subject to control, specifying the grounds in each case.

Mr. Alan Clark: A full list of items subject to export control is given in schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985 (SI 849), a copy of which is in the Library.

Implements of Torture

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences were applied for in each of the last three years regarding specially-designed implements of torture; how many countries were involved; and how many such applications were granted.

Mr. Alan Clark: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to make public such information about export licences.

Leather Footwear (Exports)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the exports of the leather footwear industry for the last available 12 months.

Mr. Alan Clark: Leather footwear to the value of £113 million was exported in the 12 months to December 1985.

Regional Aid

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to review the workings of regional aid with particular reference to the qualifying areas based on the new travel-to-work areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The administration of the revised regional assistance schemes introduced in November 1984 is closely monitored. I propose to review these aspects by the end of the year.

Telegraph Poles

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take action to seek to prevent British Telecom erecting telegraph poles in south Hatfield.

Mr. Butcher: British Telecom's powers to erect telegraph poles are governed by the telecommunications code set out in schedule 2 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, though British Telecom's licence limits the application of these powers in the case of conservation areas, national parks and the like. It is not my right hon. Friend's intention to propose changes.

Research and Development

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the gross and per capita expenditure of his Department on industrial and commercial research and development allocated *(a)* to industry, *(b)* to universities and colleges and *(c)* in total between 1975 and 1985; what information he has on comparable figures for *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* France and *(d)* Italy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The available information is given in the following table. Data for years prior to 1980-81 can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on Government spending on research and development from international sources is not subdivided according to individual Government Departments.

Expenditure on research and development in science and technology by the Department of Trade and Industry

Year	*Total*	*Universities and further education establishments*	*Industry*	*Total per head of United Kingdom population*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£*
1980-81	261	1·9	181	4·6
1981-82	316	1·6	205	5·6
1982-83	316	1·7	200	5·6
1983-84	347	1·9	254	6·1

Source: Department of Trade and Industry.

Consumer Statistics

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the percentage of total purchases of cutlery in 1985 which were imported and as to the corresponding percentages in 1980 and 1975; and what equivalent information he has in respect of electric toasters, built-in electric cookers, food mixers, footwear, sports equipment, music centres, dishwashers, washing machines, cars, electric razors, typewriters, photographic films, fountain pens, petrol engines below 10 horse power and textiles and knitwear.

Mr. Butcher: Reliable information on import penetration is not available for individual products. The following table shows imports as a percentage of home demand for activity headings, groups or classes of the standard industrial classification (1980) where these agree broadly with the categories required. Figures for 1975 and 1985 are not currently available: annual data for 1978 and 1984 are given instead.

*Import penetration**

SIC (80) AH, Group or Class	*1978*	*1980*	*1984*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
AH 3162 Cutlery and other tableware, razors	58	57	60
Group 451 Footwear	30	35	47
AH 4942 Sports goods	52	59	65
AH 3511 Passenger Cars	49	53	59
AH 2591 Photographic Materials	65	71	95
Class 43 Textiles	31	34	44
Group 436 Hosiery and other knitted goods	23	27	35

* Imports as a percentage of United Kingdom home demand (=manufacturers' sales plus imports minus exports)
Sources: Business Monitor MQ12; DTI

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications for regional selective assistance have been received by his Department from firms based in the Cannock and Burntwood constituency.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There have been eight applications totalling £473,627 for regional selective assistance in the Cannock and Burntwood constituency since the new policy was introduced on 29 November 1984.

Concorde

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report*

a statement on the contribution to the accumulated development costs of Concorde made by the revenues from the operation of the aircraft in the three most convenient recent years.

Mr. Pattie: No direct contribution to accumulated development costs has derived from the in-service operating revenues of the aircraft. However, British responsibility for the in-service support of Concorde was transferred to British Airways on 1 April 1984, at which time the airline made a total payment of £16·5 million to the Government in respect of the Government's stock of Concorde airframe and engine spares and the agreed proportion of the airline's estimated aggregate surplus on its Concorde operations to that date.

Suits (Imports)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department proposes to take to control the level of importation of men's cheap suits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Imports of men's suits from a number of state trading and developing exporting countries are subject to quantitative restrictions under bilateral arrangements. I have recently received representations from the United Kingdom industry about the very low prices of imports from one state trading country in particular, and my Department has already drawn this to the attention of the European Commission.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed by his Department's north-west office.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 1 February a total of 223 people were employed on a permanent or casual basis at the Department's north-west regional office at locations in Manchester, Liverpool and Bootle.

Land Rover

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assurances he has sought from General Motors about the security of the jobs of the employees at Land Rover in Solihull.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement my right hon. Friend made on 3 February 1986 which outlined the undertakings that we would require before any arrangement with General Motors would be acceptable to the Government. The GM worldwide distribution network particularly in the United States of America also offers the opportunity for substantial and early additional sales of Land Rover products thereby enhancing job prospects in Solihull.

Overseas Companies (United Kingdom Acquisitions)

Mr. Shore asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the identities of those public quoted companies in the United Kingdom acquired by the United States of America, Japan and EEC companies in each year since 1978.

Mr. Howard: The available information on the nationality of overseas companies which acquired United Kingdom industrial and commercial companies is published in "Business Monitor MQ7" (table 5). A further breakdown showing the number of such companies acquired by United States and Japanese companies is as follows:

Number of United Kingdom Industrial and Commercial companies acquired by foreign companies

	Total	Residence of acquiring company			
		EC	United States of America	Japan	Other
1979	6	3	2	—	1
1980	23	6	11	—	6
1981	75	14	22	—	39
1982	29	4	13	—	12
1983	24	3	12	—	9
1984	28	1	14	2	11
1985*	25	5	9	2	9

* Provisional.
Note: Excludes banking, insurance and oil companies.

In addition the Office of Fair Trading will receive information on the identities of bidding and target companies and will consider proposed mergers and takeovers which fall within the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. Many proposed mergers do not take place.

Imperial Tobacco

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what factors will affect his decision on whether to refer the Hanson Trust's takeover bid for Imperial Tobacco to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Howard: The Secretary of State will take his decision in accordance with his statutory responsibilities, and in the light of the Director General of Fair Trading's advice. He will therefore take into account all the relevant circumstances.

Steel

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing the total volume of exports and imports of steel over the most recent annual period for which figures are available and comparable figures for each of the previous 10 years, showing the percentage of steel imports in each year which came from the EEC.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The following is the information:

United Kingdom trade in steel industry products

	Exports	Imports	Percentage of United Kingdom imports from EC countries
	Million tonnes	Million tonnes	Million tonnes
1975	2·98	3·72	70
1976	3·52	4·09	64
1977	4·24	3·72	63
1978	4·22	3·67	61
1979	4·40	3·78	62
1980*	2·60	4·62	66
1981	3·78	3·31	76
1982	3·36	3·84	68
1983	3·93	3·34	71
1984	3·97	3·55	74
1985	4·69	3·75	73

* Affected by the steel strike.
Source: Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Commission of the EEC last proposed a reduction in the number of integrated steel plants in the United Kingdom; and what proposals were then made about long-term structure of the United Kingdom steel industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The European Commission has never made any such proposals.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to how many persons were employed in the steel industries of each member state of the EEC at the most recent date for which figures are available; and what percentage reduction this represents by comparison with a comparable date in 1978.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The following is the information:

Total labour force employed on ECSC activities

'000

	January 1986	January 1978	Percentage reduction
Belgium	33·8	49·7	32
Denmark	1·8	2·5	28
France	75·4	140·7	46
Greece	*4·2	n.a.	n.a.
Ireland	0·5	0·7	29
Italy	68·0	97·0	30
Luxembourg	12·6	17·4	28
Netherlands	18·7	21·9	15
United Kingdom	59·1	176·8	67
West Germany	150·4	208·2	28

Source: EUROSTAT.
*October 1985.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of staff employed in the regional office network of the Export Credits Guarantee Department;

(2) if he will make a statement on the implications for the Export Credits Guarantee Department's regional office network of the management review of the Export Credits Guarantee Department;

(3) if it is his intention to strengthen the regional office network of the Export Credits Guarantee Department;

(4) how many inquiries there were from local exporters concerning export credits insurance in each of the Export Credits Guarantee Department regional offices in 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Export Credit (Fraud)

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement concerning his plans to deal with fraud in export credit.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Export Credits Guarantee Department is constantly on the alert for fraud and has recently set up a unit to co-ordinate the Department's policy and investigate particular cases, work which was previously handled by separate parts of the organisation.

Engineering Companies

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to how many engineering companies went out of business during 1985.

Mr. Howard: Information on companies going out of business classified by industry is available only in respect of compulsory and creditors' voluntary liquidations. In Great Britain there were 1,056 compulsory and creditors' voluntary liquidations of companies classified to the metals and engineering industries (classes 22 and 31-37 of the standard industrial classification) during the period January to September 1985.

Kleinwort, Benson Ltd

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what moneys have been paid to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd by his Department in the last seven years; and for what services.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1986, c. *164*]: As far as payments to Kleinwort, Benson Ltd on the privatisation programme are concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury on 5 February 1986 at col. *186*.

Kleinwort Benson has undertaken no other work for this Department during the present Administration.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the grounds upon which recovery of an overpayment of supplementary benefit may be waived.

Mr. Major: As a general rule, steps are not taken to recover an over-provision of supplementary benefit which is wholly due to official error, but otherwise full recovery is sought. Generally the right to recover overpayments is decided by the independent adjudicating authorities. When determining the extent and method of repayment, the individual circumstances of the person required to repay are taken into account by the Secretary of State. Careful consideration is given to various factors, such as the person's age, health, domestic and financial circumstances. Where repayment would cause undue hardship or could not be cost-effectively pursued, recovery may very exceptionaly be waived.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the numbers in receipt of supplementary benefit for each category in the social security offices serving the York constituency for May 1979, June 1983 and the most recent month for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: The York constituency is covered for social security purposes by the Department's office at York, although its boundaries are not conterminous with the constituency.

The table shows the number of people receiving supplementary benefit from that office for each category at May 1979, May 1983—the nearest figures available, and December 1985—the latest figures available.

	May 1979	*May 1983*	*December 1985*
Non-unemployed persons under pension age	2,259	2,763	3,796
Unemployed persons	1,488	4,426	5,992
Persons over pension age	6,289	6,043	5,524

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in what ways, other than those generally applicable to social security recipients, the position of unemployed people will be changed by his proposals for social security.

Mr. Newton: Under income support, unemployed claimants will receive a personal allowance based on age and marital status. In addition, extra weekly help will be available to unemployed families with the introduction of the family premium. This will be payable to all those with children, on top of the personal allowance and the rates for individual children. There will also be a higher earnings disregard of £15 were couples have been unemployed for two years or more.

Exceptionally Severe Weather

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in which local office areas a period of exceptionally severe weather has been declared in the current winter.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 23 January 1986 at column *308*.

Single Payments

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* comparable statistics on the total amount paid out in single payments to claimants in different areas, based on the smallest convenient geographical areas, and on the most recent convenient dates.

Mr. Major: I am arranging for a table, showing the total amounts paid out in single payments by each of the Department's local offices during the year ended 9 April 1985, to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give, for the most recent month for which information is available *(a)* the number of single payment awards as a rate per 1,000 claimants and *(b)* the average single payment to (i) persons under pension age not required to register for work, (ii) persons under pension age required to register for work and (iii) persons over pension age for each social security office.

Mr. Major: This information is not immediately available but will be obtained as soon as possible.

NHS (Pay)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the increase in the health service index *(a)* since 1978 and *(b)* since 1979, is attributable to the nationally determined movement in the rates of pay to National Health Service employees.

Mr. Hayhoe: The contribution of pay settlements to movements in hospital and community health services pay and prices is determined both by the proportion of HCHS expenditure spent on pay, and by the extent of the pay increases themselves. Between 1978-79 and 1984-85, the latest year for which informaton is available, the HCHS pay and prices index rose by 97·6 per cent., and the index of HCHS pay rose by 99·3 per cent. Between 1979-80 and 1984-85, the HCHS pay and prices index rose by 64 per cent., and the index of HCHS pay rose by 65 per cent. About three quarters of the increase in the HCHS pay and prices index can be attributed to movements in the HCHS pay index.

Domestic Service Advice Notes

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will re-issue to health authorities the series of domestic service advice notes, particularly those concerning cleaning frequencies, management of domestic services and quality control.

Mr. Whitney: There are no immediate plans to re-issue the domestic service advice notes.

Hospitals (Cleaning Standards)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance has been issued by his Department since 1980 on the maintenance of standards of cleaning in hospitals.

Mr. Whitney: The domestic supervisors training kit was issued in 1980. Since then, our circular HC(83)18 on competitive tendering said that standards required should be clearly specified when going out to tender, and the specimen contract for domestic services, issued with DA(83)40, provides a framework for such specifications.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library his recent confidential letter to regional health authority chairpersons containing advice on the strictness of controls on the quality of cleaning in hospitals.

Mr. Whitney: The chairman of the National Health Service management board wrote to regional health authority chairmen on 3 January 1986 giving further advice to assist health authorities to obtain maximum benefits from the competitive tendering policy. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

NHS (Private Contractors)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will place in the Library for each tendering exercise, material showing the price of the winning tender, together with costs credited and debited to the in-house and commercial tenders for monitoring, overheads, capital and so on, and the below the line redundancy and early retirement costs.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social services whether it is Her Majesty's Government's policy that all affected National Health Service staff should be informed of the price of the winning tender following a tendering exercise, together with cost credited and debited to the in-house and commercial tenders for monitoring overheads, capital and so on, and the below the line redundancy and early retirement costs.

Mr. Whitney: Health authorities are expected to keep staff interests informed on competitive tendering issues as circular HC(83)18 makes clear.

NHS Staff (Early Retirement)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will advise health authorities to make known to *(a)* all tenderers, *(b)* all affected National Health Service staff and *(c)* his own Department the full costs of early retirement following each tendering exercise; and if he will place this information in the Library;

(2) what new factors have led his Department to change its advice in relation to the full costs of early retirement following a tendering exercise;

(3) on what grounds it has been decided that the full costs of early retirement should not be considered by health authorities when comparing tenders for the provision of ancillary services.

Mr. Whitney: When appraising tenders, health authorities need to compare the costs which would occur during the period of the contract. To include costs which might occur after that without having regard to probable continuing savings would be misleading. It was necessary to amend our advice to make this clear. It would not be helpful to advise health authorities to consider and make known the full cost of early retirement in the way requested.

Linen Rental

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will detail the experience that leads his Department to advise that linen rental can often prove cost effective.

Mr. Whitney: Significant use is being made of linen rental by hospitals abroad and by private hospitals in this country.

Health Authorities (Departmental Advice)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the difference in status and authority between a departmental circular to health authorities and advice such as that offered in December 1985.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will clarify the advice issued to health authorities in December 1985 to ensure that they do not understand paragraph 6 to mean that less information should be collected about the standards achieved by contractors.

Mr. Whitney: We do not consider this will discourage health authorities from collecting necessary information.

Laundry Services

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) on what grounds has it been decided that tenders should be sought whenever capital investment of £250,000 or more for laundry services is being examined;

(2) what new factors have led his Department to change its guidance in relation to the level of capital investment for laundry services above which tenders should be sought.

Mr. Whitney: Under our previous guidance a health authority could spend up to £500,000 on its laundry without going out to tender for this service. We have concluded that this limit is too high to ensure that health authorities are getting the best value for money in their laundry services. So they have now been asked to go to tender to test that the most cost effective solution is adopted before any capital expenditure of over £250,000 on laundry schemes.

Residential Homes

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people presently live in residential care; of these, how many live in *(a)* voluntary homes, *(b)* private homes, and *(c)* local authority homes; and for each category how many residents are on supplementary benefit.

Mr. Whitney: Information is not available centrally in precisely the form requested. The latest comparable data are given below.

England: Residential care homes registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984 and comparable local authority homes—31 March 1985 (provisional)

	Residents
Voluntary	*36,000
Privately run	*70,000
Local authority	121,000
	227,000

* In the case of homes for the mentally disordered we are able to give figures only for those residents who are supported by local authorities.

In Great Britain on 31 December 1984 42,000† people in voluntary and privately-run homes (including nursing homes) were in receipt of supplementary benefit and additionally 35,000† residents of residential care homes and comparable local authority homes were supported by both supplementary benefit and by local authorities.

†Provisional figures only.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* voluntary and *(b)* private residential care and nursing homes have closed down following the introduction of the Supplementary Benefit (Requirements and Resources) Miscellaneous Provisions Regulations 1985.

Mr. Whitney: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for each year since 1980 for which figures are available how much each local authority has spent on payments towards residential care in voluntary and private sector homes.

Mr. Whitney: The available figures cover payments for services provided by voluntary organisations and registered private persons. The following table gives figures for England for the years 1980-81 to 1983-84; 1984-85 national figures are not yet available. Tables showing individual local authority figures will take a little longer to compile and I will let the right hon. Member have a further reply, including 1984-85 figures where available, as soon as possible.

In addition some local authorities make general contributions to voluntary organisations whose activities may include the provision of residential care. Any such contributions are not included in the table.

	£ million cash
1980-81	119
1981-82	135
1982-83	144
1983-84	146

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) which organisations Ernst and Whinney have met in compiling their report on residential care;

(2) when he expects Ernst and Whinney to report on their survey of residential care.

Mr. Newton: Ernst and Whinney conducted a sample survey of about 1,300 homes in England, Scotland and Wales on the basis of a questionnaire backed up in some cases by interviews. About 450 have responded. I understand that discussions have also been held, in the process of designing and conducting the survey, with local and national organisations including, for example, the interested trade associations such as the National Confederation of Registered Rest Homes Association and leading charities. These were held either at Ernst and Whinney's request or at that of the bodies concerned. We expect Ernst and Whinney's report in the next few weeks.

Mr. J. Lowry

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will indicate what progress concerning Mr. J. Lowry of 62 Parkhill Avenue, Rusholme, Manchester has been made since the letter to the hon. Member for Stretford from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security of 20 December 1985; and whether he will make it his policy to seek to resolve the matter before 21 February.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the letter which my noble Friend sent to him on 5 February about the developments in Mr. Lowry's case.

Dr. A. J. Blowers

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will reappoint Dr. A. J. Blowers for a further term of office as chairman of the West Surrey and North East Hampshire district health authority.

Mr. Hayhoe: I will let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the approximate turnover of staff in grades of clerical assistant and clerical officers, respectively, in social security offices open to the public covering the Brent, East constituency, together with maximum and minimum rates of turnover naming the offices concerned.

Mr. Major: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Post Offices (Services)

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what advice he has received from the consultants appointed by him to advise on the scope for the transfer of services provided on his behalf by Post Offices to other institutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: No such consultancy exercise has been commissioned. I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the recent survey carried out on attitudes to methods and frequency of payment of benefit. The conclusions of the survey are now being studied.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Nicholas Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each quarter from 1 January 1982 the average level of direct deduction from supplementary benefit for fuel bills for claimants who are consumers of the North Eastern electricity board or consumers of the North Eastern gas board.

Mr. Newton: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the average level of all deductions for electricity and gas, for England, Scotland, Wales and Great Britain respectively. Figures are for December 1981, 1982 and 1983 (the latest available).

Average deductions for fuel

(£ per week)

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Great Britain*
December 1981				
Electricity	7·27	6·72	6·51	7·11
Gas	5·56	4·49	5·20	5·40
December 1982				
Electricity	7·83	7·20	6·50	7·59
Gas	6·46	5·21	6·06	6·27
December 1983				
Electricity	8·38	7·79	6·93	8·16
Gas	7·19	5·75	7·19	6·99

Source: Annual statistical enquiries.

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will introduce a scheme to enable letters and outstanding invoices from individual creditors to be forwarded to supplementary benefit claimants who have moved to an address unknown to those creditors;

(2) what guidelines are given to local office staff as to their response to individual creditors who are unable to trace debting customers in receipt of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Major: All information held by the Department about individuals, including their addresses, is confidential and staff are instructed not to release the information without authority. The rationale for this policy is that this informaton is obtained and held solely for the purpose of maintaining national insurance contribution records and administering social security benefits. For this reason I do not believe it would be right for the information to be used to assist creditors to recover debts.

Hospitals

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average catchment area, defined both in terms of geographical area and in terms of population, served by a district general hospital in *(a)* the south-east region and *(b)* the whole country.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information she seeks. Information on the extent and population of catchment areas served by district general hospitals is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairmen of the regional health authorities in which she has a particular interest. They may be able to provide the information requested.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* for the years 1983, 1984 and 1985 *(a)* the number of hospitals with maternity and gynaecological services without a special care baby unit and *(b)* the number of hospitals with maternity and gynaecological services without paediatric cover.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as can be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost as soon as possible.

North-Western Regional Health Authority

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1), pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, columns *143-4*, what were the difficulties in securing suitable nominations for a member of the North-Western regional health authority from a trade union background; what steps he took after October 1984 to overcome these difficulties; how many nominations he received after October 1984 from the North-West trade union congress and individual trade unions, and when; what formal response he made to those nominating bodies; and why he has not appointed any of those nominated;

(2), pursuant to the answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, columns *143-4*, why the previous member with a trade union background was not reappointed to the North-Western regional health authority; when he expects to make an appointment to the vacant post; and what criteria he will use in making such an appointment.

Mr. Hayhoe: I will let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* supplementary benefit and *(c)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit excluding lone parents, couples with children and pensioners for the latest available year in Scotland;

(2) what was the number of claimant couples with children in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year in Scotland;

(3) what was the number of lone parent claimants in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year in Wales;

(4) what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* supplementary benefit and *(c)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit excluding lone parents, couples with children and pensioners for the latest available year in Wales;

(5) what is the number of lone parent claimants in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year in Scotland;

(6) what was the number of claimant couples with children in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year in Wales;

(7) what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefit *(b)* supplementary benefit and *(c)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit, excluding lone parents, couples with children and pensioners for the latest available year;

(8) what was the number of claimant couples with children in receipt of *(a)* family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year;

(9) what was the number of lone parent claimants in receipt of *(a)*family income supplement, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* supplementary benefit and *(d)* unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit for the latest available year.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* sickness benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit pension, *(c)* industrial disablement benefit and *(d)* non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension or *(e)* severe disablement allowance for the latest available year in Wales;

(2) what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* sickness benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit pension, *(c)* industrial disablement benefit and *(d)* non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension or *(e)* severe disablement allowance for the latest available year in Scotland;

(3) what was the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* sickness benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit pension, *(c)* industrial disablement benefit and *(d)* non-contributory invalidity pension and housewives' non-conributory invalidity pension or *(e)* severe disablement allowance for the latest available year in England and Wales.

Mr. Major: The information for the latest years for which annual statistics are available is set out in the following table. The figures derive from a computer analysis of statistical returns. Those for severe disablement allowance indicate that the figure given in the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and the Disabled to the hon. Member for Dunfermline. West (Mr. Douglas) on 29 November 1985 at columns *714-15*, for October 1985, which was based on a clerical count, was under-estimated.

	England and Wales	*Wales*	*Scotland*
Sickness benefit*	295,000	26,000	43,000
Invalidity benefit*	630,000	88,000	102,000
Industrial disablement benefit†	170,000	20,000	16,000
Severe disablement allowance‡	220,000	19,000	32,000

* As at 2 April 1983.
† As at 30 September 1983.
‡ As at 30 March 1985.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the number of claimant pensioners *(a)* aged over 80 years and *(b)* aged between 60 and 79 years in receipt of (i) retirement pension, (ii) supplementary pension and (iii) retirement pension and supplementary pension for the latest available year in Scotland;

(2) what was the number of claimant pensioners *(a)* aged over 80 years and *(b)* aged between 60 and 79 years in receipt of (i) retirement pension, (ii) supplementary pension and (iii) retirement pension and supplementary pension for the latest available year in Wales;

(3) what was the number of claimant pensioners *(a)* aged over 80 years and *(b)* aged between 60 and 79 years in receipt of (i) retirement pension, (ii) supplementary pension and (iii) retirement pension and supplementary pension for the latest available year.

Mr. Major: The information requested is given in the table.

Persons receiving at 31 March 85

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Thousands Great Britain (Total)*
Retirement pension only				
age 60-79	5,430	566	324	6,320
age 80 and over	1,076	106	64	1,245
Supplementary pension only*				
age 60-79	57	7	4	69
age 80 and over	13	2	1	16
Retirement pension plus supplementary pension†				
age 60-79	904	95	63	1,062
age 80 and over	429	40	26	495
Total	7,909	816	482	9,207

* 31 December 83
† includes those receiving payment by combined order book and those with separate retirement pension and supplementary pension books.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he received the interim report of the expert working party on breast cancer screening; when he expects to place it in the Library; and when he expects to receive the full report.

Mr. Hayhoe: The interim report of the working group on breast cancer screening was received on 8 January and was placed in the Library on 6 February. The final report is expected later this year.

Non-dependant Deductions

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he has any plans to amend the relevant regulations to remove the requirement for a young person on a community industry scheme to pay for a full non-dependant deduction from parents' housing benefit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to link the level of non-dependant deductions to the level of income of the non-dependant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The future arrangements mentioned in the White Paper for non-dependant deductions are still under consideration.

Registered Homes Tribunals

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has laid down any guidelines about the composition of each registered homes tribunal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The Registered Homes Act 1984 requires that a registered homes tribunal shall consist of a chairman appointed from the legal panel and two other members from the panel of experts. The chairman and the legal panel are appointed by the Lord Chancellor and the expert members and panel of experts by the Lord President of the Council. No person is qualified for appointment to the legal panel unless he possesses legal qualifications considered suitable by the Lord Chancellor. Members of the panel of experts have to have had experience in social work, medicine, nursing, midwifery or such other experience as the Lord President considers suitable.

Heating Additions

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which housing estates in Scotland are currently designated as hard to heat for the purpose of supplementary benefit claimants receiving estate rate heating additions; what are the current criteria for designation; and how many households in Scotland are currently in receipt of estate rate heating additions.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Workers

Mr. Cohen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the average earnings of British farm workers compare with their counterparts in Germany, Holland and France.

Mrs. Fenner: The most recent published information on the comparative earnings of agricultural workers in the United Kingdom, West Germany, the Netherlands and France relates to 1982 and is shown in the table. Results for 1984 are expected to become available shortly.

Average Gross Hourly Earnings of Permanent Male Manual Workers in Agriculture (Excluding Benefits Received in Kind) 1982

	National Currency	*£
United Kingdom	£2·06	2·06
Germany†	11·79 DM	2·75
Netherlands	14·31 Fl	3·06
France	24·49 F.Fr	2·02

Source:
Statistical Office of the European Communities.
* Converted at the appropriate market rate of exchange.
†. National source. Includes workers employed on holdings of 50 hectares and over, excludes workers specialising in the cultivation of crops.

Sheep Worrying

Mr. Crouch asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will institute an inquiry into the loss of sheep killed by stray dogs; and if he will consider introducing measures strengthening the penalties against the owners of these dogs;

(2) what compensation is payable from public funds to sheep farmers who suffer loss of sheep killed by stray dogs.

Mrs. Fenner: The loss of sheep and other livestock killed by dogs is a matter of concern to the Government. Livestock worrying is an offence under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953, and the maximum fine on the owner or handler of a dog found worrying livestock on agricultural land was raised in 1984 to £400. The Animals Act 1971 makes the keeper of a dog which kills or injures livestock responsible for the damage and liable to a claim for compensation, and under the same legislation farmers may shoot a dog if there is no other way of preventing it attacking their stock.

The problem of worrying is well understood, and I do not believe there are grounds for an inquiry. However, I am aware that the legislation must be supplemented by a vigorous campaign of education, publicity and advice. My Department is contributing to this by continuing its successful publicity campaign launched in 1984. I would be glad to enlist my hon. Friend's assistance in this campaign, and will be sending him the Department's material on the subject.

Less Favoured Areas

Mr. Speller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average delay in settling appeals on less favoured areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Fenner: Appeals against the exclusion of land from the less favoured areas have to be considered against a number of criteria. Checks on the first of these, land quality, are already under way but will take some months to complete given that approximately 11,000 representations have been received. Appeals which satisfy the land quality test will then have to be assessed against economic and demographic criteria before any case is put to the Commission for adjustment of the United Kingdom's LFA line.

We shall be notifying appellants over the coming months whose land fails the land quality test. They will then have the opportunity to make representations to a regional panel.

Feed-quality Cereals

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is sponsoring into industrial uses for feed-quality cereals.

Mr. Gummer: There is already a large existing body of knowledge on this topic, and I believe that it is more appropriate for further research to be sponsored by the industry rather than the Government. My Department, therefore, sponsors no such research.

Poultry

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether regulations governing poultry factories specify the extent of access by staff to the shackle line up to the point of entry into the scald tank to make certain that no poultry enters it alive;

(2) whether regulations require poultry processing factories to have adequate ventilation and humidifying equipment in the poultry enclosures;

(3) whether regulations on stunning equipment used in poultry slaughter require use of visual or audible warning devices to indicate failure of equipment.

Mrs. Fenner: Regulation 8(1)*(b)* of the Slaughter of Poultry (Humane Conditions) Regulations 1984 requires that adequate provision be made for action to be taken for removing birds from the slaughterline if necessary.

Regulation 5*(c)* requires the provision of adequate ventilation for birds awaiting slaughter.

Supplementary guidance on access to the slaughter line, on control of humidity and on the responsibility of management to ensure that stunning equipment is at all times in good working order is to be included in a code of practice to be made under section 3A of the Slaughter of Poultry Act 1967.

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any regulations require the staff of poultry slaughterhouses to be licensed.

Mrs. Fenner: It is proposed to make regulations to require the licensing of those engaged in the stunning and slaughter of poultry.

Mr. Hancock asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations govern the maximum permitted time that poultry is allowed to be transported between farm and slaughterhouse.

Mrs. Fenner: There are no regulations governing a maximum time that poultry may be transported between farm and slaughterhouse. However, both the Conveyance of Live Poultry Order 1919 and the Transit of Animals (General) Order 1973 protect the welfare of poultry in transit by regulating the conditions under which they may be transported.

Surplus Food

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the sales of surplus food at special low prices proposed by the European Commission to be financed by the £2,000 million special fund will be subject to the agreement of the management committee.

Mr. Gummer: The European Commission has the responsibility for measures disposing of stocks of agricultural products held in public intervention. It is usual for Commission measures for stock disposal to be put to a management committee for its opinion.

However, the Commission has made no proposals for a special fund to finance stock disposals.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the proposal by the European Commission that agricultural spending in 1986 should be further increased by £500 million and that a special fund of £2,000 million should be established for surplus disposal.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Nimrod Patrols

Dr. Godman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why his Department has decided to mount extra Nimrod patrols over the south-western approaches, as announced on 19 December; if Her Majesty's Government have decided to replace the Nimrods with civil aircraft; and if this is a temporary measure as a result of Spanish accession to the European Economic Community.

Mr. Gummer: Since 1 January 1986, the frequency of Nimrod patrols over the south-western approaches has been increased temporarily to ensure that, during the settling-in period following Spanish accession, Spanish vessels fishing in that area comply fully with Community conservation and control measures.

The replacement of Nimrod aircraft with civilian aircraft has been decided, as my right hon. Friend said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson-Smith) on 14 November 1985, at column 280, because the aerial surveillance task can be carried out more effectively by using aircraft of a lighter type.

Monofilament Gill Nets

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to introduce any measures to prohibit the carriage of monofilament gill nets on fishing vessels in English and Welsh inshore waters.

Mr. Gummer: No. These nets may be legitimately used in English and Welsh coastal waters to catch a variety of fish species.

Agricultural Workers

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of farms in the United Kingdom employ *(a)* one to five persons, *(b)* five to 10 persons and *(c)* over 10 persons; and what are the equivalent figures for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and each of the standard regions in England.

Mrs. Fenner [*pursuant to her reply*, 24 January 1986, c. *343*]: The information requested is presented in the following tables.

Table A
Distribution of Agricultural Holdings by Employee Size Group
June 1984

	Number of employees				
Region	*0*	*1-5*	*6-10*	*over 10*	*Total*
North	6,263	5,217	211	71	11,762
(per cent.)	53·2	44·4	1·8	0·6	100
Yorkshire & Humberside	8,630	7,233	601	260	16,724
(per cent.)	51·6	43·2	3·6	1·6	100
East Midlands	8,850	7,311	746	382	17,289
(per cent.)	51·2	42·3	4·3	2·2	100
East Anglia	6,320	5,364	903	617	13,204
(per cent.)	47·9	40·6	6·8	4·7	100
South East	12,573	11,317	1,524	1,188	26,602
(per cent.)	47·3	42·5	5·7	4·5	100
South West	19,252	15,053	867	339	35,511
(per cent.)	54·2	42·4	2·4	1·0	100
West Midlands	10,574	7,861	589	342	19,366
(per cent.)	54·6	40·6	3·0	1·8	100
North West	7,162	5,115	277	154	12,708
(per cent.)	56·4	40·2	2·2	1·2	100
ENGLAND	79,624	64,471	5,718	3,353	153,166
(per cent.)	52·0	42·1	3·7	2·2	100
WALES	20,070	9,309	276	97	29,752
(per cent.)	67·5	31·3	0·9	0·3	100
SCOTLAND	17,153	13,113	694	203	31,165
(per cent.)	55·0	42·1	2·2	0·7	100
GREAT BRITAIN	116,847	86,895	6,688	3,653	214,083
(per cent.)	54·6	40·6	3·1	1·7	100
NORTHERN IRELAND*	35,835	8,147	46	22	44,050
(per cent.)	81·4	18·5	0·1	0·1	100
UNITED KINGDOM	152,682	95,042	6,734	3,675	258,153
(per cent.)	59·2	36·8	2·6	1·4	100

* Excluding seasonal and casual workers.
Note: Employees are defined to include all labour except farmers, partners, directors and their spouses. For Northern Ireland, 7,193 seasonal and casual workers are also excluded.

Table B
Distribution of agricultural employees by size group of holding
June 1984

	Number of employees			
Region	*1-5*	*6-10*	*over 10*	*Total*
North	9,381	1,505	1,296	12,182
(per cent.)	77·0	12·4	10·6	100
Yorks & Humberside	14,085	4,440	6,498	25,023
(per cent.)	56·3	17·7	26·0	100
East Midlands	14,677	5,550	10,333	30,560
(per cent.)	48·0	18·2	33·8	100
East Anglia	11,645	6,728	15,145	33,518
(per cent.)	34·7	20·1	45·2	100
South East	24,400	11,305	31,549	67,254
(per cent.)	36·3	16·8	46·9	100
South West	28,214	6,247	8,228	42,689
(per cent.)	66·1	14·6	19·3	100
West Midlands	14·981	4,366	7,152	26,499
(per cent.)	56·5	16·5	27·0	100
North West	9,904	2,003	3,472	15,379
(per cent.)	64·4	13·0	22·6	100
ENGLAND	127,287	42,144	83,673	253,104
(per cent.)	50·3	16·6	33·1	100
WALES	15,726	1,962	2,096	19,784
(per cent.)	79·5	9·9	10·6	100
SCOTLAND	25,490	5,024	4,024	34,538
(per cent.)	73·8	14·5	11·7	100
GREAT BRITAIN	168,503	49,130	89,793	307,426
(per cent.)	54·8	16·0	29·2	100
NORTHERN IRELAND*	10,985	332	566	11,883
(per cent.)	92·4	2·8	4·8	100
UNITED KINGDOM	179,488	49,462	90,359	319,309
(per cent.)	56·2	15·5	28·3	100

* Excluding seasonal and casual workers.
Note: Employees are defined to include all labour except farmers, partners, directors and their spouses. For Northern Ireland, 7,193 seasonal and casual workers are also excluded.

THE ARTS

Government Funding

31. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the increase of Government funding for the arts since 1979.

Mr. Luce: Total central Government expenditure on the arts and libraries programme will have increased by nearly 25 per cent. in real terms between 1979-80 and 1986-87. This figure includes the additional central funding following the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan county councils; excluding that, the real increase over the period will have been about 11 per cent.

Expenditure

32. **Mr. Buchan** asked the Minister for the Arts what is the expected change in local authority expenditure and total expenditure on the arts between 1985-86 and 1986-87, both in cash and real terms.

Mr. Luce: Central Government expenditure on the arts and libraries programme is planned to rise between 1985-86 and 1986-87 by nearly 18 per cent. in cash and by over 12 per cent. in real terms. The Government's planning totals for local authority current and capital expenditure on libraries and museums have increased by 13 per cent. in cash and by 8 per cent. in real terms over the same period.

Individual and Corporate Contributions

33. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Minister for the Arts what plans he has to encourage individual and corporate giving to the arts.

Mr. Luce: The business sponsorship incentive scheme has already proved very successful and I am continuing it with an increased budget of £1·75 million for 1986-87.

Various tax incentives already encourage individual and corporate giving, but we shall continue to look for ways of improving the situation.

Arts Council

34. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Arts Council; and what was discussed at that meeting.

Mr. Luce: I met the chairman and secretary-general of the Arts Council on 4 February and we discussed arts matters of mutual concern.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent by the Arts Council for consultants' fees arising out of abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Luce: No separate budget was prepared; but I understand that approximately £14,000 has been spent, to date, on fees for two consultants.

Sadler's Wells

35. **Mr. Freud** asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will make direct funding available to Sadler's Wells; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: No. Funding is a matter for the Arts Council; but I know that the council is concerned to see that its clients, notably the Sadler's Wells royal ballet, can continue to use this historic and much loved theatre. The council has announced today that it will hold a meeting on Friday 14 February with Sadler's Wells and the three companies that regularly use the theatre. This is to discuss the possibility that the companies should be given additional funds to enable them to pay economic levels of rent. In that way the Arts Council would make a substantial contribution to keeping the theatre open.

I applaud this initiative, and I hope and believe that a scheme on these lines, combined with other fund-raising efforts as appropriate, will enable the main stage of the theatre to remain open.

I understand that there is also a separate plan to open a new community studio during 1986-87. No doubt Sadler's Wells will be discussing this with the Arts Council and the relevant successor authorities.

South Bank

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts what information he has as to what services in the South Bank arts complex are due to be contracted out.

Mr. Luce: As the South Bank announced in November 1985, it will be contracting out cleaning services, security and some maintenance.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts (1) what was the full cost to the Arts Council of the fact finding visits abroad made by Mr. Richard Pulford and Mr. Ronald Grierson in preparation for assuming responsibility for the South Bank arts complex; and which countries were visited;

(2) what reason was given by the Arts Council for the salary difference between the posts of director of arts co-ordination and general director (administration) on the South Bank;

(3) if he was consulted over the salaries being offered for the Arts Council's new posts of director of arts co-ordination, controller of marketing and resources, controller of touring and controller of planning.

Mr. Luce: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Evennett asked the Minister for the Arts whether the Government have completed their consultations on a new system for handling the income generated by national museums and galleries; and what financial provision will be made for these in 1986-87.

Mr. Luce: Consultations on the basis outlined in my predecessor's statement on 26 July 1985 have confirmed the need, which was recognised in unanimous recommendations earlier from the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee, for a greater incentive for the national museums and galleries both to maximise their receipts and to use them more effectively. In my view such an incentive entails two main changes:

i. forecast receipts should no longer be specifically netted off against total Estimate requirements to provide a net grant; and

ii there should be a reasonable facility to carry over unspent moneys at the end of the financial year.

I believe that, in order to effect these changes within existing conventions, it would be necessary to convert the method of financing from direct vote provision to grant-in-aid. I therefore propose to consult the Public Accounts Committee on this, and also the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the Education, Science and Arts Select Committee. Subject to their views, I would propose to make this conversion from the financial year 1986-87 for the nine national museums and galleries for which I am responsible, so that the institutions could derive the earliest possible benefit from the change. The main Supply Estimates will initially be presented to Parliament on the existing direct vote basis. Implementation of the changes would entail presenting revised Estimates to Parliament in the summer.

Under the new arrangements, the Government would not now propose to determine the grant-in-aid as a given percenage of each institution's assessed running costs, as foreshadowed in the statement of 26 July 1985. In the light of the representations which the museums and galleries have made, the size of the revised grants in 1986-87 would, instead by settled starting from each institution's net vote provision (excluding revotes) for running costs in 1985-86. The former proposal would have involved reducing the grants of some institutions and increasing those of others in order to produce a uniform percentage to be financed by the Exchequer with inequitable results; the method now envisaged avoids the need for that adjustment.

The cash levels of grant-in-aid would be increased as appropriate in future years without any further adjustment to reflect forecast changes in receipts for those years. At

the end of each financial year the institutions would be able to carry over unspent moneys equivalent to up to two per cent. of the annual grant and up to 10 per cent. of their annual receipts. Arrangements would be made to enable them to transfer part of their receipts to endowment funds if appropriate for the financing of long-term projects. The system of revotes of unspent surplus receipts from previous years would no longer be necessary, and would cease upon the introduction of grant-in-aid.

The purpose of these proposals is not to replace public by private funding, but to provide an opportunity for a larger growth in the total funding available to the national museums and galleries than would otherwise be possible. The institutions and their trustees will need a firm basis on which to make their plans. It is the Government's intention that there should be no further change in the method of settling their grants for running costs for at least three years, and that an adequate period of notice should be given of any intention subsequently to introduce such a change. During that period no institution, however much it earns, would have its grant-in-aid affected on that account.

Revised grants-in-aid for 1986-87 should be announced after completion of the consultations with the parliamentary committees. They would differ somewhat from the provision to be initially in the Supply Estimates, due partly to the changed treatment of receipts and revotes, and partly to my intention to allocate virtually the whole of the available resources to increases in the institutions' baselines. I would however reserve the right in future years to allocate part of the available total selectively in response to any special needs, as appropriate. The provision which I propose for 1986-87 on the existing direct vote basis is summarised below and is within the arts and libraries programme total given in the Public Expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702). Within the sum of £57·8 million for 1986-87, about £8·2 million is being devoted to purchase grants for which the basic provision (excluding revotes) continues at the cash levels established in 1985-86; and some £49·6 million for other net running costs, compared with £48·1 million in 1985-86.

Provision on existing direct vote basis £ million cash

	*1985-86		1986-87	
	†Purchase grant	†Other net running costs	†Purchase grant	†Other net running costs
British Museum	1·460	11·533	1·494	11·931
Imperial War Museum	0·100	4·345	0·126	4·318
National Gallery	2·750	3·889	2·750	3·936
National Maritime Museum	0·205	4·131	0·205	4·568
National Portrait Gallery	0·310	1·467	0·310	1·509
Science Museum	0·461	8·493	0·384	8·749
Tate Gallery	1·815	3·830	1·815	3·834
Victoria and Albert Museum	1·145	9·553	1·145	9·790
Wallace Collection	—	0·877	—	0·907

* 1985-86 figures include supplementary estimates to date.
† Purchase grant and other net running cost figures include revotes where applicable in each year.

DEFENCE

Service Widows (Pensions)

Mr. Viggers asked the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the cost of paying *(a)* a forces family pension or *(b)* a service widow's minimum rate pension to all widows of service men irrespective of the date of their marriage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: On *(a)*, the cost of paying a forces family pension to all widows of post retirement marriage irrespective of their date of marriage is now estimated at around £13 million a year. This is only a broad indication of the additional order of costs drawn from the current cost of widows pensions and general population statistics on the age of marriage. On *(b)*, without specific data on the marriages of service men after retirement, which is not available, it is not possible to estimate the cost of the award of pensions in this category. Of course such a change, if implemented would have to apply throughout the whole of the public service, and not only to the armed forces, which would naturally greatly add to the cost. The Government have no plans to introduce pensions for the widows of those service men and others who retired before 6 April 1978 and married after retirement.

Service Personnel (Housing)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to enable service men and women to be assisted with home purchase during their service, or at the time of retirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The MOD has for many years operated a scheme to give advances of pay to armed forces personnel to assist them with house purchase. Recovery is on an interest-free basis. Subject to certain conditions this advance is available either during their service (RN/RM) or near the time of retirement (Army/RAF). More recently the Government introduced in 1983 a new scheme which gives service personnel a discount of 30 per cent. on the purchase price of surplus married quarters. The Government have also allowed time in service accommodation to count towards the qualifying period for discount on the purchase of local authority and new town houses under the right to buy scheme. Although we keep the position under review, no further improvements are planned at present.

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the rights of service personnel to obtain rented

municipal housing at the end of their service; if he has any plans to extend or amend these rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The allocation of council housing is the responsibility of local authorities. Members of the armed forces who are approaching the end of their service and wish to rent council housing must register with local authority housing departments in the normal way.

A joint circular from the Department of the Environment and Welsh Office has been sent to all local authorities in their areas to acquaint them with the special circumstances which should be taken into account when considering applications from ex-service personnel against their normal criteria. The Ministry of Defence can issue a "Certificate of cessation of entitlement to occupy a Service quarter and of impending homelessness" which gives local authorities as much early warning as possible of a need to rehouse a service family.

I have no plans to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to depart from current arrangements.

Research Expenditure

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department will spend on research in the current financial year.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to table 3.1 of the "Statement on Defence Estimates 1985, Volume 2" (Cmnd. 9430-11).

AOR Royal Fleet Auxiliaries

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision on the contract to build the first of class AOR Royal Fleet Auxiliaries.

Mr. Garrett asked the Secretary of State for Defence which shipbuilding company has been successful in obtaining the contract to build an auxiliary oil replenishment vessel for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Lee: Tenders for the design and build of the first two new auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels are currently being evaluated. No decisions have been taken on the size and timing of orders.

Research and Development

Mr. Livsey asked the Secretary of State for Defence what position Britain holds in the table of amount spent on defence-related research and development compared to other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries, including France.

Mr. Lee: NATO does not publish figures in the form requested. However, some comparative estimates for certain nations, based on material provided by the OECD, were published in Economic Trends, No. 382, August 1985, page 84, table 3.

Details of United Kingdom expenditure on defence research and development in recent years are set out in table 3.2 of the "Statement of Defence Estimates 1985" (Vol. 2) (Cmnd. 9430 II).

Low-flying Aircraft

Mr. Ashton asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints his Department received in 1985 about low-flying aircraft.

Mr. Lee: The number of inquiries and complaints received in 1985 about low flying was 4,206.

Defence Systems (Collaboration)

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the European countries involved in collaborative programmes with the United Kingdom in the procurement of defence systems, together with the dates of the memoranda of understanding, the proportion of work in percentage and pounds sterling terms which accrues to each country in respect of the procurement order for each system for each country; the companies involved; and what information he has as to whether any such company or its employees have been the subject of any prosecution in their own, or any other country concerning the supply of arms or ammunition to another country within the last seven years, and the countries which it is alleged were so supplied.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I will answer shortly.

W30 Helicopter

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out his current intentions towards air staff target 404 and the W30 helicopter.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Our requirements for support helicopters are currently under review.

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Trotter asked the Secretary of State for Defence which firms of *(a)* accountants and *(b)* consultants have been appointed to report to him since 1979 on the defence procurement implications of placing naval orders with Harland and Wolff; when they were appointed; when their reports were received; and to what extent the firms concerned had previous knowledge or experience of the affairs of the company.

Mr. Lee: None.

HMS Nelson

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the cost of refurbishing the wardroom of HMS Nelson.

Mr. Lee: The latest breakdown of the cost of refurbishing the wardroom of HMS Nelson is as follows:

Wardroom HMS Nelson
Breakdown of refurbishment costs

	£'000
Repairs to stone and brickwork	378
Replacement/repairs of Mechanical Services (ie heating, plumbing, sanitary fittings)	651
Replacement of electrical services, lighting protection	267
Renewal of rainwater goods (drainpipes, gutters)	29
Roof repairs	65
Redecoration (inside and out)	63
Alterations to existing cabins (ie bringing up to Scale area and provision)	350

	£'000
General repairs (new plasterwork, floor repairs, panelling, joinery, fire doors, fire appliance re-sitings	294
Work in BARHAM Block (temporary galley)	30
Asbestos removal	8
PSA supplies items (Building and civil Engineering—fittings, furniture, carpets and curtains)	149
PSA supplies items (Mechanical and Electrical—galley equipment)	51
Contingencies (standard allowance for unforeseens, especially pertinent to old and listed buildings)	30
	£2,365K

To this figure of £2,365,000 will have to be added approximately £394,000 (VAT £299,000; inflation £95,000).

Total £2,759,000
(Rounded up=£2·8 million)

The wardroom at HMS Nelson includes associated facilities occupying some 4,085 sq metres of floor space.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what tendering procedure was used for the contract to refurbish the wardroom of HMS Nelson; and if this procedure was in line with that usually used.

Mr. Lee: The normal competitive tendering procedure in line with normal practice was used to determine the contractor for the refurbishment of the wardroom of HMS Nelson.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the cost of £2·8 million for the refurbishment of the wardroom of HMS Nelson is made up of value added tax.

Mr. Lee: The figure is £299,000.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what accommodation is available in the wardroom of HMS Nelson.

Mr. Lee: Modernisation of the main wardroom building will provide single living accommodation to scale for 15 senior officers and 51 junior officers. Additionally five senior officers and 35 junior officers are accommodated in an adjoining annex, giving a total capacity henceforth of 20 senior officers and 86 junior officers.

Naval Houses (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he has any plans to release on licence any more naval houses to Portsmouth city council;

(2) if he has any plans to sell any of the houses in his Department's ownership in Portsmouth;

(3) if he has any plans to release any of the naval houses in Portsmouth to local housing associations.

Mr. Lee: Not at present.

United States Bases

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the ambassadors' agreement of April 1950 regulating the presence of United States bases in the United Kingdom and the subsequent administrative agreement of 1953 are both still classified documents.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

National Armaments Director

Mr. Shore asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the post of National Armaments Director was first established; who is the present incumbent; how often meetings take place between the British National Armaments Director and his European colleagues; and if they reach their recommendations by majority voting or by unanimity.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The position of National Armaments Director within the Ministry of Defence came into being with the establishment of the conference of national armaments directors under the North Atlantic Council in 1966. Initially the United Kingdom representative was the Chief Scientific Adviser at the Ministry of Defence, but following the creation of the Procurement Executive in 1971 and until 1985 the position was held by the Chief of Defence Procurement. However, the position of National Armaments Director was one of the responsibilities passed to the Chief of Defence Equipment Collaboration when the post was created in March 1985. The present incumbent is Sir David Perry. As regards the frequency of meetings between national armaments directors, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the written answers given to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) on 24 January at column 336-37. Discussions between national armaments directors are governed by the form in which they are conducted; decisions are reached by mutual agreement.

Civil Power (Military Aid)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Defence what section or department inside his Department is specifically responsible for military aid to the civil power; and how many people are employed on such work.

Mr. Stanley: No one section or Department has sole responsibility in this area. The number of those involved will vary according to what assistance is, or may be, requested.

Dockyards (Redundancy Pay)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost of redundancy payments for the 2,400 jobs to be lost at Rosyth and Devonport dockyards.

Mr. Lee: The previously announced reductions in manning levels of 2,000 at Devonport dockyard and 400 at Rosyth are expected to be achieved mainly through natural wastage and voluntary methods, including some voluntary redundancies and voluntary premature retirements. No redundancies are anticipated at Rosyth and we hope that only voluntary redundancy, probably fewer than 600, will be required at Devonport. The estimated cost of the average industrial redundancy payment, based on the average industrial wage and assuming 30 years service, is £11,250.

NATO Personnel (Regulations)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence to what military regulations service personnel are subject while stationed at a foreign base or joint North Atlantic Treaty Organisation base, where personnel from the host nation or any other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation force are also stationed.

Mr. Lee: United Kingdom personnel are subject to United Kingdom service law wherever they may be serving at home or abroad. They are also required to observe whatever local military regulations govern activities at foreign and NATO bases at which they are stationed.

Service Personnel

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many service personnel applied for and were granted a discharge within six months of enlistment during the years 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(2) how many service personnel submitted applications for discharge after six months had elapsed since enlistment and were turned down for any reason other than failure to follow the correct application procedure during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(3) how many requests for discharge turned down due to failure to follow the correct procedure or submit correct documentation were made prior and subsequent to the first six months of enlistment during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(4) what record is kept of applications for discharge which are incorrectly submitted;

(5) how many service personnel requested information regarding discharge during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(6) what record is kept of requests for information, both formal and informal, regarding discharge procedure and regulations;

(7) how many service personnel requested discharge *(a)* on reaching the age of 18 years having enlisted below the age of 18 years and *(b)* before their contract was due to expire, but after six months from enlistment during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(8) how many service personnel requested that their contract of engagement be shortened during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(9) how many service personnel were recorded as being absent without leave during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(10) what procedure is followed subsequent to a unit suspecting one of its personnel of being absent without leave;

(11) how many service personnel were imprisoned as a result of being found guilty of absence without leave during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(12) how many service personnel were held in a place of detention for periods in excess of 24 hours upon returning from a period of absence without leave during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(13) how many service personnel were found guilty of deliberate absenteeism but not imprisoned; and how many were not held in places of detention, on the grounds of mitigating circumstances regarding their action during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(14) how many service personnel were detained at Colchester for offences which are not punishable under civilian law during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(15) how many service personnel cases whose alleged offences were triable under civilian law were dealt with by any form of military hearing during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(16) how many service personnel were charged with an offence during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(17) how many investigations were conducted by the special investigations branch into cases of alleged homosexuality during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(18) how many service personnel were detained for periods exceeding 24 hours during investigations conducted by the special investigations branch during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(19) how many service women were interviewed or interrogated by male investigating officers during the course of homosexual investigations during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee: I shall reply in due course.

Service Personnel (Offences)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel charged with an offence applied for legal aid during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee: In the calendar years 1983, 1984 and 1985 the following number of applications for legal aid were made by Army and RAF personnel:

Year	*Army*	*RAF*
1983	221	104
1984	246	139
1985	320	148

No central record is maintained of applications for legal aid from Royal Navy personnel and this information could only be obtained with disproportionate effort.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what record is kept of applications for legal aid made formally or informally by an accused to any military personnel.

Mr. Lee: A record is kept of each formal application for legal aid made to the appropriate Army and RAF service legal aid section. In the case of the Royal Navy, no central record is maintained of legal aid applications and this information could only be obtained with disproportionate effort. Records are not kept of informal inquiries about legal aid.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were defended at courts martial by a qualified lawyer during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee: The number of service personnel who were defended by civilian lawyers at courts-martial during 1983, 1984 and 1985 were as follows:

	1983	*1984*	*1985*
Royal Navy	2	5	1
Army	208	228	299
RAF	104	138	145

No central record is kept of the number of cases where service men are represented by service officers who are legally qualified and this information could only be obtained with disproportionate effort.

Cammell-Laird (Construction Work)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *183*, he will state when Cammell-Laird is expected to start construction work on each of the vessels SSK-02, SSK-03 and SSK-04, respectively; and when each vessel is expected to be handed over to the Royal Navy.

Mr. Lee: Construction of SSK-02 has started and work on 03 and 04 will follow over the next three years. It is not the practice to give planned acceptance dates.

Helicopter Search and Rescue Services

Mr. Viggers asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the cost to his Department of operating search and rescue services by helicopter;

(2) what is the cost of maintaining a search and rescue helicopter at HMS Daedalus at Lee-on-Solent.

Mr. Stanley: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Viggers asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give his estimate of the cost per hour in flight of operating a Wessex search and rescue helicopter.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Mr. Viggers asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department recovers any of the cost of operating search and rescue helicopter services from any other person or organisation.

Mr. Stanley: Yes. The Department of Transport is responsible for providing search and rescue services for civilians and the Ministry of Defence recovers a proportion of its operating costs from that Department.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 February 1986

SCOTLAND

New Towns (Population)

Mr. Robin Cook asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the projected population of the five Scottish new towns as at June 1990; and how this compares with the present population of the new towns and with the population stipulated as the trigger for winding up the development corporation, respectively.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Registrar General does not produce projections of population for areas smaller than local authority districts. The latest available population figures for the new towns and the population stipulated as the trigger for winding up the development corporations are as set out below. As was indicated in November 1984 when the Government announced their conclusions about the winding-up of the development corporations, the dates on which the wind-up triggers are likely to be reached cannot be predicted with complete certainty although the triggers are broadly consistent with the new towns commencing wind-up at different dates in the 1990s. No development corporation is to begin the wind-up process before 1 April 1990. Because of the difficulties in predicting demographic trends the position is to be reviewed in 1989.

	Population as at 30 September 1985	*Trigger population*
East Kilbride	70,200	74,250
Cumbernauld	49,739	54,000
Glenrothes	38,000	43,000
Livingston	39,550	49,500
Irvine	57,500	63,000

Scottish Plant Breeding Station

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs have so far been incurred and what are the expected final costs involved in the transfer of staff of the Scottish Plant Breeding Station in Edinburgh to the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Dundee.

Mr. John Mackay: The gross cost of transferring staff from the Scottish Plant Breeding Station at Pentlandfield to the Scottish Crop Research Institute at Invergowrie is £230,000 to date, and is expected to rise to about £400,000 by completion of the merger. Gross capital costs incurred since the merger relate both to accommodation for transferred staff, and the development programme of the new Institute. The estimate of the capital costs already committed on projects directly related to the merger are approximately £3·3 million. Detailed project costs for further accommodation required are not yet available, but may amount to about £2 million. These figures do not take account of any savings likely to arise from the rationalisation of all provision on a single site.

Cash Limits

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make any changes to his Department's cash limits for 1985-86.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I intend to make changes to two of the cash limits within my responsibility. The cash limit for Vote XV:2 (Agricultural Services and Fisheries, Scotland) is being reduced by £400,000 from £66,453,000 to £66,053,000. This reduction, together with the reductions announced by my predecessor on 12 December 1985, at column 745, will partly offset increased expenditure of £14,776,000 on Vote XV:1 (Agricultural Support, Scotland) which is not subject to a cash limit and for which a Supplementary Estimate will be presented to Parliament shortly.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for Vote XV:15 (Education, Arts, Libraries and Social Work, Scotland) will be increased by £752,000 from £148,634,000 to £149,386,000. The increase, which is not classified as public expenditure, is required to cover additional payments to Lothian and Strathclyde regional councils for the outstanding loan debts on Napier college and Glasgow college of technology on their transfer to central institution status.

Avalanche Forecasting

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the discussions with the relevant bodies to establish a better system of avalanche forecasting in Scotland to produce recommendations.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 February 1986, c. *273*]: The Scottish Office is not involved in any discussions on this matter.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Resources

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from police authorities about the availability of resources to the police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I have received representations from a number of police authorities about various aspects of police expenditure. In view of the increasing demands on the police service, particularly the need to counter drug abuse, public disorder and terrorism, I intend to increase the proportion of police expenditure met by central Government through police grant from 50 to 51 per cent. in 1986-87. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be making a further £22 million of block grant available in England. Under the block grant system this will ensure that all police authorities receive an increase in grant and there is no less for other authorities. This will help all police authorities in England and Wales without placing too great a burden on the ratepayers. It will enable the joint police authorities in the metropolitan areas to provide the level of service implied by their expenditure levels, and I look to them to do so. At the same time, they will be able to make precepts below the maximum levels which I have set or proposed.

Parole

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners seeking parole are kept waiting for a decision beyond their possible parole date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I regret that this information is not available. I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to transfer Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer from Her Majesty's prison, Brixton, to a women's prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans to transfer either woman from Brixton prison at present.

Ms. O'Dwyer and Ms. Anderson have been placed provisionally in the highest security category, category A. The only accommodation suitable for female category A remand prisoners in the London area is at Brixton, on a self-contained landing.

Stray Dogs

Mr. Crouch asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce legislation to give the police increased powers for the capture and extermination of stray dogs involved in the killing and maiming of sheep; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 already provides for the seizure and disposal of dogs which have been worrying livestock. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (schedule 6, paragraph 7) has, with effect from 1 January 1986, added to police powers under the 1953 Act by providing justices of the peace with power to issue a warrant authorising the police to enter and search premises in order to identify a dog suspected of worrying sheep or other livestock.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the criteria required for issue of a firearms certificate.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Firearms Act 1968 requires a chief officer of police to satisfy himself that an applicant has a good reason for having in his possession the firearm or ammunition in respect of which the application is made, that he is a fit person to be entrusted with it and that he can be permitted to have it in his possession without danger to the public safety or to the peace.

Brixton and Wandsworth Prisons

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time in any recent week for which figures are conveniently available for which prisoners have been confined to their cells at *(a)* Brixton prison and *(b)* Wandsworth prison.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

Merseyside Fire Service

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why his Department has imposed a recruitment freeze, effective from 1 April, on the Merseyside fire service; and what criteria were used to determine the level of budget approved for the Merseyside fire service in relation to the figure it had requested.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No recruitment freeze has been imposed. Under paragraph 4 of the Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (Establishment, Support Services and Management Schemes) Regulations 1985 the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority will be consulted shortly about its establishment scheme for 1986-87, including what is appropriate for recruitment.

It is for the authority itself to settle its budget for 1986-87, and the maximum precept prescribed in the draft Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1986 should enable it broadly to maintain the existing levels of service.

Passports

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *6*, on how many occasions in each of the last five years passport officers have exercised their discretion in the exceptional circumstances described; if he will now take steps to widen this discretion to permit the issue without charge of a replacement passport where the family passport has used up less than a third of its period of validity and where it has been used on no more than one occasion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that the statistics requested are not available. We have no plans to extend the criteria on which current discretion operates.

Immigration

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 18 December 1985, *Official Report*, column *176*, how he intends to proceed with the discussions about representations made by right hon. and hon. Members in immigration cases.

Mr. Hurd: Draft guidelines have been prepared setting out proposals for the practice to be followed in the general run of immigration cases, and a copy of the draft guidelines has been placed in the Library.

The objective of these proposals is to assist right hon. and hon. Members to carry out their responsibilities on behalf of their constituents in a way which is compatible with an effective and efficient immigration control in accordance with the Immigration Act 1971 and the immigration rules which have been approved by Parliament. The guidelines provide a facility for right hon. and hon. Members to obtain the facts relating to a decision to refuse entry quickly so that they can decide whether there is a case for making substantive representations. At the same time the guidelines seek to set sensible time scales within which representations should be made.

My hon. and learned Friend is writing to a number of right hon. and hon. Members, whom we know to be closely involved or interested in these matters, inviting their views on the guidelines proposed but the views of all

hon. Members will be welcomed. The House will have an opportunity to debate the proposals before new guidelines become effective.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

"Official Report"

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what progress has been made to resolve the problems of grading, staffing and conditions of work in the Department of the *Official Report*.

Mr. Beith: The Commission is aware of the difficulties which have arisen in the Department of the *Official Report* over staffing levels, and in reaching agreement to revised grading and pay linkages.

Negotiations commenced yesterday (10 February) with representatives of Hansard editorial and reporting staff on new management proposals for dealing with these problems. It is hoped that these negotiations will lead to agreement with the one group of staff in the House with whom it has not so far been possible to reach a negotiated settlement based on recommendations made by the Board of Management following the Staff Inspector's recently completed grading review.

Mr. McWilliam asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, when the *Official Report* last had a full complement of 10 Committee Sub-Editors and 14 trained Reporters; what is the present complement; and how many are trainees.

Mr. Beith: The complement of 10 Committee Sub-Editors is regularly staffed at that level. The complement of Reporters is 17 with not more than 14 full Reporters for more than a short period. A Reporter is usually training for two years. On this basis the number of Reporters and Trainee Reporters on 1 April each year since 1979 is:

	Reporter	*Trainee Reporter*
1979	11	1
1980	7	10
1981	8	8
1982	7	6
1983	9	2
1984	10	5
1985	10	6
10 February 1986	10	8

It is the practice to make up the shortfall in experience and to cover for peak periods by employing freelance Reporters on a casual basis.

Departmental Staff

Mr. McWilliam asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the established complement of staff of each Department of the House in 1979 as compared with 1985, together with the percentage increase in each Department over that period of time.

Mr. Beith: The established complement of staff (full-time equivalent) of each Department of the House at 1 April in 1979 and 1985 together with the percentage increase during this period is as follows:

	1979	*1985*	*Percentage increase*
Speaker's Office	10	14	40·0
Department of the Clerk of the House	119	146	22·7
Department of the Library	118	149	26·3
Department of the Serjeant at Arms	181	185	2·2
Administration Department	60	93	55·0
Department of the Official Report	70	75	6·6
Refreshment Department	*234	235	0·41

Notes:

(i) * This figure is as at 1 April 1980, since the Refreshment Department was not previously a Department of the House.

(ii) Figures for increase in complement between 1970 and 1985 show that the percentage variations between Departments over that longer period were markedly different from those indicated in the table.

Palace of Westminster (Facilities)

Mr. Watts asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will bring forward proposals to restrict the use of the facilities of the Palace of Westminster by parliamentary delegations representing totalitarian Governments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: No.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reform

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what decisions he has taken following the recent consultation on the treatment of balances and capital receipts after the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I announced some of my decisions during the rate support grant debate on 20 January. This reply confirms what I said then and deals with other issues raised by the consultation process.

The residuary bodies will be able to use the cash balances of the outgoing authorities to close the accounts of those authorities and to make compensation payments falling due to staff in the first year after abolition.

The remaining balances, including unapplied capital receipts, will in general be distributed by the residuary bodies to the boroughs or districts in each area. In the light of the views expressed during the consultation, I have concluded that the distribution should be carried out pro rata to population. In the consultation paper I proposed that as an exception to the general rule any balances attributable to the Inner London education authority, the Northumbria police authority and the Tyne and Mersey tunnels should pass to the successor authorities responsible for those operations. I have now accepted that there should be one further exception: in accordance with the wishes of interested parties locally, balances attributable to Birmingham international airport will remain with the airport undertaking.

I look to the residuary bodies, with the assistance of the outgoing authorities, to give successor authorities their best estimate of the amount of balances likely to be distributed to each successor very shortly now, to assist the rating and precepting process. The timing of the actual

distribution during 1986-87 may be settled between the residuary bodies and the recipient authorities in the light of local circumstances.

Where the outgoing authorities have accumulated capital receipts which have not been used to justify additional capital expenditure under part VIII of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, the unused spending permission will be passed on to the boroughs or districts pro rata to population, or where appropriate to the other authorities referred to above, whether or not the receipts form part of the cash balances. Further consideration is being given to the mechanics of this.

Capital receipts accruing to the residuary bodies after abolition will in general be distributed to the boroughs or districts, pro rata to housing investment programme capital allocations in the case of housing receipts and pro rata to population in other cases.

But in three cases the cash from receipts will be differently treated. Mortgage principal repayments will be retained by residuary bodies to redeem debt, in accordance with normal local authority practice. I have also decided to allow residuary bodies to use receipts from asset sales to pay for any capital expenditure needed to prepare the assets for sale, and I have so far announced that in London at least £10 million will be available from receipts to endow a new charitable trust. Boroughs and districts will still receive the spending permission associated with the receipts.

Contracts (Non-commercial Clauses)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to seek to prohibit local authorities from inserting non-commercial clauses in contracts for the supply of goods and services.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which my hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Local Government gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) on 30 October, at column 542. I understand that the Building Employers Confederation is giving serious consideration to taking action in the courts.

Housing Development (Solihull)

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters he received in the course of the consideration of the West Midlands county structure plan in favour of and against the housing development proposed for land near Four Ashes road, Dorridge, Solihull.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has received 35 letters about the proposed housing development at Four Ashes. Of those, 28 opposed the proposal and seven were in favour. While recognising the strength of local feelings, my right hon. Friend accepted the independent panel's recommendation that some increased provision at Four Ashes was the least harmful way of meeting the overall requirement, especially as this involved no additional land take and no loss of green belt.

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will release Solihull council from the requirement to provide a five-year supply of land for housing.

Mr. Tracey: There is no formal provision for relaxing the requirement laid down in circular 15/84 to maintain a five-year supply of land. While the circular sets out a general policy, local circumstances must also be taken into account when applying its provisions to particular cases.

GLC (Grants)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total value of grants made by the Greater London council to each London borough which he has approved; which individual boroughs have received the grants; and if he intends to exercise his powers under section 91 of the Local Government Act 1985 to recover any such grants which have not been authorised by him.

Mr. Tracey: The total value of financial assistance provided by the GLC to the London boroughs for which my right hon. Friend has given his consent under section 91 of the Local Government Act 1985 is as follows:

Borough	*Total value (£)*
Barking and Dagenham	4,398
Brent	100,000
Ealing	387,500
Enfield	27,500
Greenwich	2,166,252
Hackney	35,814
Hammersmith and Fulham	155,300
Haringey	1,846,015
Havering	49,000
Hillingdon	30,363
Hounslow	116,570
Kensington and Chelsea	26,600
Lambeth	427,465
Newham	228,000
Redbridge	216,240
Richmond Upon Thames	25,000
Southwark	61,696
Tower Hamlets	4,394,158
Waltham Forest	117,349
Wandsworth	100,000
	10,515,220

Following his announcement on 18 December, at column 219, my right hon. Friend is considering the extent to which he would wish to exercise his discretion to direct the London Residuary Body to recover the value of assistance given without his consent under the provisions in the 1985 Act. My right hon. Friend has also made clear his concern about the continuing assistance proposed to be given by the GLC to individual boroughs on a selective basis, particularly where this involves funding activities continuing beyond abolition. We take the view that, with the approach of abolition, there is in general little justification for the GLC seeking at this stage to fund post-abolition activities from ratepayers' money. Decisions as to such funding are primarily the province of successor authorities. My right hon. Friend will therefore wish to look very closely at any further applications for consent under section 91 of the 1985 Act. Where assistance is given without his consent or consent is refused, he intends to exercise his discretion under schedule 15, paragraph 2(2), to the Act to direct the London Residuary body to recover the value of the assistance from the authority concerned in every case where this appears to be justified.

Sewerage

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of houses in England are connected to the public sewerage system; how this compares with other member states of the European Community; and how this compares with the United States of America.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not held by my Department. However, I would refer the hon. Member to the November 1985 edition of "Water Facts" published by the Water Authorities Association, which gives figures for the percentage of the population connected to sewers and comparative figures for other member states of the European Community. I have today placed copies in the Library.

Local Authority Housing (Research)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities which have been invited to help with research into access to local authority housing; and what response each has given.

Mr. John Patten: The Department invited the following local authorities to help with its research project into access to local authority housing:

Manchester
Lambeth
Sheffield
Hackney
Sandwell
Islington
Southwark
Dudley
North Tyneside
Sefton
Trafford
Bradford
Basildon
Kingston upon Hull
Leicester
Langbaurgh
Nuneaton and Bedworth
Hyndburn
Woking
Wycombe
Carlisle
Wychavon
Harrogate
Leominister
South Cambridgeshire
West Somerset
Poole

Eighteen authorities have agreed to participate; Leominster and Wycombe have declined, and seven others, Islington, Southwark, Manchester, Sheffield, Basildon, Leicester and Poole, have yet to reply to the invitation.

Housing Improvement

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he makes of the employment potential of each £100,000 of *(a)* public and *(b)* private investment in housing improvement.

Sir George Young: The employment effects are approximately equal for public and private investment in housing improvement. About 70 to 75 per cent. of the cost is estimated to be spent on labour, directly and indirectly. This varies according to the nature of the work. However, assessment of the overall effects on employment potential depends on a wide range of assumptions about effects on competing expenditures, on interest rates, on exchange rates and other factors.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from voluntary organisations located in Merseyside concerning their future funding; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the future of the Liverpool philharmonic hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has received several representations about the future of the Liverpool philharmonic hall. Under the main property transfer order the hall is transferred to Liverpool city council as functional successor, but my right hon. Friend is prepared to consider the alternative of temporary transfer to the residuary body for onward transmission to a trust if this can be made financially viable, and subject to the outcome of consultation with Liverpool. I understand that there is now a good prospect of this, and officials of the Office of Arts and Libraries have therefore written to Liverpool asking the council for its views on the proposal by 14 February.

Croxteth Hall and Country Park

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the future of Croxteth hall and country park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about Croxteth hall and country park. Under the main property transfer order this will pass to Liverpool city council as successor authority.

Merseyside Innovation Centre

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the future of the Merseyside innovation centre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I have received no representations about Merseyside innovation centre other than the letter from the hon. Member dated 4 February 1986.

The centre is a project with a scope beyond the Liverpool city council area. As such it is classed as a county-wide scheme and would be appropriate for consideration for funding under section 48 of the Local Government Act 1985, but the Merseyside district authorities have so far failed to agree upon the arrangements for establishing such a scheme.

Liverpool city council and Sefton MBC have submitted bids of £50,267 and £10,400 respectively under the transitional funding arrangements. These are currently being considered by my Department. The Merseyside

innovation centre is also seeking other sources of future funding, and early discussions have been arranged with the EEC to look into possible funding through the European business network programme.

Liverpool Ice Rink

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the future of the Liverpool ice rink; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 6 February, at column 248, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton).

Empire Theatre, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the future of the Empire theatre in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has received several representations about the future of the Empire theatre. Under the main property transfer order the lease on the theatre is transferred to Liverpool city council as functional successor, but I understand that two private entrepreneurs are having discussions with the theatre trustees and with Merseyside county council about the possibility of their taking over the running of the theatre.

Merseyside (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has plans to pay an official visit to Merseyside in the near future.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am looking forward to visiting Merseyside in May or June.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities were affected by the multiplier factor in the rate support grant calculations in 1984-85; and what were the changes to the multiplier in each of these local authorities for the year 1985-86.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under the "Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1984-85" multipliers other than 1·0 were determined for the following local authorities. The percentage change between the multiplier for those authorities determined under that report and under the "Rate Support Grant Report (England) 1985-86" was as follows:

	per cent.
Cumbria	2·4
Durham	·4
Essex	−·1
Hertfordshire	−·3
Northumberland	2·8
Surrey	−·5
City of London	—
Camden	·5
Greenwich	·4
Hackney	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	7·7
Islington	—
Kensington and Chelsea	9·7
Lambeth	−6·2
Lewisham	—
Southwark	—
Tower Hamlets	3·2
Wandsworth	2·8
Westminster	—
Barking and Dagenham	·8
Barnet	—
Bexley	—
Brent	—
Bromley	—
Croydon	—
Ealing	—
Enfield	—
Haringey	—
Harrow	—
Havering	—
Hillingdon	3·6
Hounslow	−·6
Kingston-upon-Thames	3·4
Merton	—
Newham	2·3
Redbridge	—
Richmond-upon-Thames	3·6
Sutton	—
Waltham Forest	−1·2
ILEA	24·7
GLC	−1·8
Manchester	1·8
Salford	10·7
Liverpool	4·9
St. Helens	1·2
Gateshead	·2
South Tyneside	1·3
Coventry	·3
South Yorkshire	1·1
Tyne and Wear	·0
North Bedfordshire	2·6
Luton	4·6
Mid Bedfordshire	−2·7
South Bedfordshire	4·3
Newbury	−1·9
Slough	1·0
South Bucks	3·1
Fenland	·1
Peterborough	·8
Hartlepool	11·0
Langbaurgh	9·5
Middlesbrough	19·2
Stockton-on-Tees	6·7
Penwith	1·6
Barrow in Furness	1·1
Copeland	−2·4
Amber Valley	−1·7
West Derbyshire	−2·9
East Devon	·6
North Devon	3·6
South Hams	1·0
Teignbridge	·3
Torridge	1·3
West Devon	−·5
Weymouth and Portland	5·9
Wimborne	−6·3
Chester-le-Street	2·1
Darlington	1·6
Easington	1·9
Sedgefield	5·2
Wear Valley	2·8
Brighton	11·3
Eastbourne	3·3
Hove	·9
Lewes	2·7
Basildon	−·8
Uttlesford	−3·6
Forest of Dean	·4

	per cent.
Stroud	−·3
East Hampshire	−1·6
Hart	−2·8
Havant	4·2
New Forest	−2·2
Portsmouth	5·4
Rushmoor	3·9
Southampton	·6
Wyre Forest	1·4
Broxbourne	−·7
East Hertfordshire	·1
Stevenage	3·6
Watford	8·2
Welwyn Hatfield	6·9
Great Grimsby	1·1
Kingston upon Hull	·6
Scunthorpe	−13·6
Dartford	2·8
Dover	4·5
Gravesham	·3
Thanet	1·1
Blackburn	1·3
Blackpool	·4
Burnley	1·4
Fylde	−·3
Wyre	−4·2
Leicester	4·1
East Lindsey	1·1
Blyth Valley	−3·4
Scarborough	6·2
Ashfield	−·5
Bassetlaw	−·8
Broxtowe	·1
Mansfield	−7·4
Nottingham	6·4
The Wrekin	3·1
Sedgemoor	·6
West Somerset	2·5
Cannock Chase	1·1
Forest Heath	−2·1
Mid Suffolk	−5·3
Epsom and Ewell	−1·1
Woking	·5
North Warwickshire	−·3
Nuneaton and Bedworth	3·3
Adur	−·4
Chichester	−1·3
Isles of Scilly	·1

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received from the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive its list of sites for investigation as nuclear dumps; when he intends to present this list to Parliament; whether he intends to change the list or consider the case for particular places in that interim period; and what representations he is willing to receive from areas concerned about the possibility of being on that list, before it is presented to Parliament.

Mr. Waldegrave: The chairman of UK NIREX Ltd. wrote to my right hon. Friend on 8 January setting out proposals. These are currently being considered. My right hon. Friend is always willing to consider representations from hon. Members.

Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

Mr. Woodcock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will agree to the transfer of the Liverpool philharmonic hall to a charitable trust adequately funded; and if he will seek the support of the local authorities in providing that funding.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *336-37*]: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing).

EMPLOYMENT

Self-employment

Mr. Bellingham asked the Paymaster General what measures he plans to take to encourage self-employment.

Mr. Trippier: We are taking a number of measures to encourage self-employment. The enterprise allowance scheme which helps unemployed people to start their own businesses is to be expanded to 80,000 places for 1986-87. More resources are being allocated to local enterprise agencies to allow them to offer improved services to those who wish to start businesses. The Manpower Services Commission is refocusing its adult training programme more sharply on promoting enterprise and self-employment. The commission is also planning to increase the enterprise and self-employment elements of the youth training scheme, community programme and voluntary projects programme to encourage more people to consider self-employment.

Self-employed Persons

Mr. Yeo asked the Paymaster General what is the total number of self-employed people in Britain.

Mr. Lang: In September 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of self-employed people in Great Britain was provisionally estimated to be 2,590,000.

Mr. Deakins asked the Paymaster General what is the basis of calculations for changes in the number of self-employed; and what information is available about the main types of self-employment.

Mr. Lang: The Department's self-employment estimates are obtained from the censuses of population, the latest of which was held in 1981, updated by applying proportionate changes in self-employment as estimated from a labour force survey (LFS). For periods since the date of the latest available LFS results, currently spring 1984, the estimates assume continuation of the rate of change observed in a previous period.

The estimates for years for which census of LFS data are available are analysed by industry and by region and the detailed estimates published in articles in *Employment Gazette*.

Other details which are available directly from the LFS include analyses of the occupation and age of the self-employed.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Paymaster General if he will give a breakdown by region of the number of individuals who have been self-employed in each of the last 15 years for which figures are available; and in each of these years what this figure represents as a percentage of the total number of individuals in paid work in that region.

Mr. Lang: The figures are contained in the following tables:

Self employed people in June of each year

thousands

Region	*1971*	*1972*	*1973*	*1974*	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
South East	641	640	674	673	648	631	614	633	651	675	700	715	730	857	908
East Anglia	75	79	81	77	78	75	73	76	79	83	87	90	94	103	115
South West	210	204	200	182	180	169	158	152	146	187	227	220	213	232	232
West Midlands	163	164	162	162	164	161	157	149	141	156	170	174	177	188	194
East Midlands	132	133	131	117	133	122	111	113	116	130	144	151	157	163	172
Yorkshire and Humberside	160	160	162	165	164	162	160	147	134	149	164	167	169	203	216
North West	223	213	216	225	214	209	204	209	214	216	217	221	224	259	273
North	84	80	82	81	80	86	93	85	77	81	84	87	91	93	96
Wales	118	113	115	110	115	122	128	126	124	119	115	120	126	145	155
Scotland	148	146	146	143	158	151	144	152	160	154	149	164	179	185	197
Great Britain	1,954	1,932	1,969	1,935	1,933	1,888	1,843	1,842	1,842	1,950	2,057	2,109	2,160	2,433	2,558

Self employed as a percentage of the civilian employed labour force in June of each year

Region	*1971*	*1972*	*1973*	*1974*	*1975*	*1976*	*1977*	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
South East	8·0	8·0	8·3	8·4	8·1	8·0	7·8	8·0	8·0	8·3	8·8	9·1	9·2	10·7	11·1
East Anglia	11·0	11·3	11·1	10·4	10·4	10·1	9·7	10·0	10·1	10·5	11·3	11·7	12·1	13·5	14·0
South West	13·7	13·2	12·5	10·7	10·6	10·0	9·3	8·8	8·4	10·5	12·8	12·6	12·4	13·1	13·1
West Midlands	6·9	7·0	6·7	6·7	6·9	6·9	6·7	6·3	5·9	6·6	7·7	8·1	8·5	8·9	9·1
East Midlands	8·9	8·9	8·5	7·3	8·2	7·5	6·8	6·9	6·9	7·8	8·9	9·5	10·0	10·5	10·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	7·8	7·8	7·7	7·7	7·6	7·6	7·5	6·9	6·2	7·0	8·1	8·5	8·7	10·4	11·0
North West	7·6	7·3	7·3	7·7	7·4	7·3	7·2	7·3	7·4	7·6	8·1	8·5	8·7	9·9	10·3
North	6·4	6·1	6·0	6·1	5·9	6·4	6·9	6·4	5·8	6·3	7·0	7·4	8·0	8·2	8·5
Wales	10·9	10·4	10·3	10·0	10·3	10·9	11·4	11·0	10·7	10·6	10·9	11·6	12·2	13·8	14·7
Scotland	6·9	6·8	6·6	6·4	7·1	6·8	6·5	6·8	7·1	6·9	6·9	7·7	8·5	8·7	9·2
Great Britain	8·3	8·2	8·2	8·0	8·0	7·9	7·7	7·6	7·5	8·0	8·8	9·2	9·5	10·5	10·9

British Leyland

Mr. Dalyell asked the Paymaster General which discussions he has had with General Motors on the employment implications of the future of British Leyland, Bathgate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: None. The closure of Bathgate was proposed by the British Leyland board in its 1984 corporate plan which was discussed in detail between the Department of Trade and Industry and British Leyland. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told the hon. Member on 6 February, the position is unchanged by recent announcements concerning talks between British Leyland and General Motors. Discussions about possible future use of the facility are continuing locally, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is keeping in close touch with British Leyland and has made it clear that he stands ready to help any viable proposition.

Long-term Unemployed Persons

Mr. Thurnham asked the Paymaster General what are the objectives of his Department's policy on the long-term unemployed; how he is monitoring its effectiveness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend on 21 January at column *118*. In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 12 November 1985 that the Manpower Services Commission had been asked to test two new measures to help the long-term unemployed in their search for jobs. These measures, operating since January in nine pilot areas, consist of in-depth counselling interviews at jobcentres, and a net job start allowance of £20 per week for those taking jobs earning less that £80 per week. The pilots are being carefully monitored to establish whether they should be extended more widely.

Youth Training Scheme

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General which specific companies in the west midlands region have offered places to YTS trainees for the extended two-year programme; and how many places have been offered by each individual company.

Mr. Trippier: The information requested is listed by Manpower Services Commission training division area:

Training Division Area Office—Birmingham

Provider	*Number of places offered*
Henry Boot	70
Reflections	72
Copec housing	10
Freight—Rover	29
IMI Kynoch	6
Newey & Ayre	100
James Beattie	15
Jaguar Cars	12
West Midlands Fine Service	25
John Frost	6
Cadbury's	58
Land Rover	40
Lucas Aerospace	18
Walter Smith	30
Midland Electric Manufacturing Co.	20
NEC	6
Greenall Whitley	20
Hardy Spicer	16
West Midlands Police	60
James Carrington	4
Sutcliffe Catering	20
Caroline Leisure	17
Lucas Electrical	40

Provider	Number of places offered
Post Office	96
Bromich Catering	12
IMI Training Services	20
Delta B2	40

TD Area Office—Coventry

Provider	Number of Places Offered
Alvis	10
Courtaulds	20
Coventry Co-op	30
Coventry Chamber of Commerce	273
Coventry Radiator	14
Dunlop	80
GEC	75
Guy Associates	75
Jaguar	40
Midland Link	135
Lloyds British	130
MGTS	333
Massey Ferguson	12
Talbot	50
Whitman Bennett	12
GTA	61
JH Pitman	75
GEC Large M/Cs	200
Thelma Dawkes	21
Automative Products	30
Galla Training Agency	105
Neaton TW	90
Warwickshire GTA	46
IDC Ltd.	10
Results	182
IDTS	18
Leamington Intec	145
Rugby Intec	145
Nuneaton Intec	120
Garage and Transport	45
Bedworth Itec	52
Martanne	40
St. Mary's Church	50
3 As	40
Galliford Lindley	12
JHP Atherstone	155
Atherstone TW	60
International Hotel School	30
Leamington Secretarial College	30
St. Francis	30
Arthur Rank	11
Rugby Design	10
Rugby Itec	75
Ace	20
British Leyland	10
As good as new	130
HCITB	70

TD Area Office—Dudley/Sandwell

Provider	Number of places offered
Dudley	
James Beattie	20
Henry Boot Ltd	65
Corbet Management Services	235
R. K. Grunau	45
B. R. Hammersley Ltd	40
Keyboard Training	60
J. H. P.	100
Trevor Leddington	6
Link Organisation	200
Metcon	194
M.O.S.T.	72
O.J.A.	30
Team	150
West Midlands Training Group	40
West Midlands Group Training	20
Inter-skill	100
NACRO	100
Sandwell	
Allbright and Wilson	25
W. and T. Avery	30
Babcock Power	26
Billingtons	44
Central Training Group	24
G. E. C. Small Machines	51
J. H. P.	50
Link Organisation	175
Lloyds British Training	40
Martin James Hair Design	175
Metcon	56
Midland Foundry Training Centre	20
NACRO	85
Pentotech	210
Pims	40
Providence Group Training	159
Elfrida Rathbone Society	60
St. James and St. Johns	45
Sandwell Training Association	301
Saver Centre	15
S.T.A.R.T.	180
Tipton Youth Training	170
Y.M.C.A.	105
Youth Skill Training Agency	60

TD area office—Staffordshire

Provider	Number of places offered
Bass Brewing	45
Pirelli	76
Burton Rubber Co.	36
FH Burgess	37
Micro Applications	90
G.E.C. Turbines	50
United Co-op Society	180
G.E.C. Meters	20
Borough Arms Hotel	50
Judas Allman	100
Michelin Tyre Co.	50
Wood and Sons	30
Wrists; Wires and Cables	75
Staffordshire Potteries	43
Churchill Pottery	32
Arthur Wood Ltd.	46
Josiah Wedgewood	191
George Staples	30
Thomas Bolton	30
J. C. Bamford	30
G.E.C. Industrial Controls	22
T.I. Creda	26

TD Area Office—Telford

Provider	Number of places offered
Henry Boot	65
Roses and Shrubs	15
Royce Management	54
Severnrise Kennels	8
Wyke Equestrian Centre	11
S. W. M'Connell	80
Perkins Engines	58
Telford School of Welding	15
Watkin, Starbuck & Jones	246
Iron bridge Gorge Museum Trust	30

Provider	Number of places offered
Disabled Skills	18
Margetts Foods	10
Link—51	21
Brintons	46
Foxworth Farm	6
Gordon Russel	5
Martin James McHale	90
Herfordshire Hairdressing	45
Ledbury Preserves	9
Nei-ape Allen Gears	8
Redman Heenan	46
Carpets of Worth	22
S.E.G.T.A.	160
Margaret Ursell	3
H. P. Bulmers	20
Mr Bamber	30
Worcester Royal Porcelain	30
Small Business Developments	120

TD area office—Wolverhampton

Provider	Number of places offered
Beaties	39
Blenheim	40
John Brennand	47
Cannon	15
Carvies	60
Chubb	24
Dowty Boulton Paul	36
Glynwed	14
Goodyear	22
GKN Tech	9
Lampit and Partners	320
Lucas	28
Marston	30
Querty	30
Seamless Tubes	15
Spicer Transmission	30
Tarmac plc	11
BRD	13
Bournevale Stables	20
Corbetts	180
W. A. Gould	15
Hair by David	30
Incomm	100
McKechnie	40
Midland Hotel	38
J. Parkes	32
Pitmans	150
Peter Pyne	15
Starbuck Motors	3
Henry Boot	130
Tarmac Roadstone	40
W. Midlands Co-op	80

Retail Prices

Mr. Waller asked the Paymaster General what is the latest information which he has regarding the percentage change in the prices of bread, milk, beer, bus fares, newspapers and children's clothing over the period since 1974; and how the percentage change in each of these commodities compares with that for the retail prices index as a whole over the same period.

Mr. Lang: The latest available information is as follows:

Percentage Changes in Retail Prices Indices between January 1974 and December 1985

	Per cent.
Bread	242·9
Fresh milk	313·3
Beer	407·1
Bus fares	386·9
Newspapers and Periodicals	453·1
Children's clothing	164·4
Retail Prices Index—"all items"	278·9

Inner Cities (Aid)

Mr. Hancock asked the Paymaster General if he can give a list of all the cities that were considered, before the aid was given for the new initiatives, for aid to the inner city announced by his Department on 6 February.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This is a pilot initiative, and we chose the areas because we felt they were together broadly representative of the problems faced by inner city residents. It would serve no purpose to list other areas which were not selected, even if at this stage we could recollect all those areas mentioned at some stage or other of the discussions inside Government.

Local Economic Initiatives

Mr. Alton asked the Paymaster General what framework there is for consultation between local authorities and his Department concerning the development of local economic initiatives.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: I am anxious that the locally based inner cities initiative which I announced to the House on 6 February should, wherever possible, operate in co-operation and consultation with the local authorities concerned. I hope to meet those local authorities soon to discuss how best to establish the necessary links.

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether any of the meetings which have taken place between officials of his Department and officials of the Commission for Racial Equality have involved matters relating to the Welsh language in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No, although at the November 1985 meeting of the Commission for Racial Equality's Welsh consultative committee, which an official of the Welsh Office attends, an official of the commission gave a brief and general account of an industrial tribunal case where the Welsh language was an issue.

Sewerage

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of houses in Wales are connected to the public sewerage system; how this compares with other member states of the European Community; and how this compares with the United States of America.

Mr. Mark Robinson: This information is not held by the Department, but figures for the percentage of the population connected to sewers and comparable figures for

other member states of the European Community are to be found in the November 1985 edition of "Water Facts", published by the Water Authorities Association. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Dairy Crest, Johnstown (Closure)

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the employment implications of the closure of the Dairy Crest depot, Johnstown in Carmarthen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have received a number of representations from individuals and organisations about the closure of the Dairy Crest plant in Johnstown. However, the closure of the plant, while regrettable, is a matter for the commercial judgment of Dairy Crest as part of a rationalisation programme to improve the productive and competitive performance of its cheese-making capacity.

NHS (Expenditure)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the percentage cumulative growth of National Health Service expenditure in each Welsh health authority in each year since 1979 *(a)* in retail price index terms, *(b)* in terms of National Health Service pay and prices and *(c)* after taking account of the annual growth in demand for health services arising from demographic factors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information given in the following table relates to the recurrent revenue resources made available to health authorities in the period since 1979-80. The capital resources provided to individual health authorities are subject to fluctuating programmes of expenditure, and the family practitioner services, which are demand determined, no longer fall within health authorities' responsibilities. The percentage growth figures given in each year have been adjusted for inflation using the GDP deflator, since this approach reflects the true input cost to the economy as a whole of resources provided. The use of the RPI is not considered relevant. Equally, it would be inappropriate and misleading to revalue the recurrent resources made available to individual authorities by reference to the national NHS indices of pay and prices, because the composition of individual authorities' expenditure can vary substantially from the national average.

While it is recognised that health services need to grow at present by some 2 per cent. per annum in order to meet the pressures generated by demographic changes, medical and technological advances and by Government policy objectives, this does not imply a corresponding requirement to increase expenditure by this amount. Services are developed both by increased resource provision and by greater efficiency in the use of resources. In fact, as will be seen from the following figures, recurring revenue allocations to health authorities in Wales have grown on average by more than 3 per cent. per annum since 1978-79 after adjustment by the GDP deflator, irrespective of the service development potential of the efficiency savings that have been and are continuing to be made for the further benefit of patient care.

Per cent. Cumulative Growth in recurrent revenue resources 1978-79 to 1986-87
(after adjustment for inflation using GDP deflator)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86†*	*1986-87‡*
Clwyd	3·7	18·6	21·1	21·4	24·9	28·7	29·4	32·3
East Dyfed*	—	—	—	2·6	6·3	8·6	8·8	10·5
Pembrokeshire*	—	—	—	1·4	5·3	12·9	14·5	17·3
Gwent	5·0	14·3	16·0	17·5	20·7	21·6	20·4	21·8
Gwynedd	3·5	13·1	15·3	17·4	19·9	29·0	33·0	34·1
Mid Glamorgan	2·3	10·2	10·9	12·4	13·8	16·2	18·1	20·8
Powys	5·6	14·8	19·5	21·9	23·1	24·5	24·2	26·1
South Glamorgan	2·9	10·7	11·2	13·2	14·5	15·7	16·1	17·8
West Glamorgan	4·4	13·3	15·9	18·4	20·3	23·8	30·7	36·0
Total	3·8	13·1	14·8	16·5	18·9	21·7	23·2	25·6

* In the case of East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire district health authorities the growth figures relate to the period from 1982-83, at the time of the inception of these authorities.

† Recurrent resources for 1985-86 estimated on the basis of prospective growth figures likely to be released from central reserves by 31 March 1986.

‡ Recurrent resources for 1986-87 estimated on the basis of the prospective take up of growth moneys during the remainder of 1985-86 and the recurrent element of the allocated cash increase for 1986-87. It should be noted that these figures are exclusive of the growth monies earmarked for centrally funded developments in 1986-87 which will be allocated and taken up by authorities during the course of the year.

Building Workers

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many skilled building workers he estimates are *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed in Wales at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information regarding skilled building workers is not separately available.

Bronchitic Diseases

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average figure for people with bronchitic diseases in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England and *(c)* the United Kingdom for the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information requested is not available centrally. The number of deaths and discharges from hospitals in Wales of people suffering from bronchitic diseases was 4,590 in 1984, the latest year for which figures are available.

Information relating to England and the United Kingdom is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average wage of Welsh farm workers; how this compares with that in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In the year ended September 1985 the average weekly earnings of full-time hired men in agriculture in Wales were £118·24 for 45·5 hours worked. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that this compares with £130·33 for 46·6 hours worked for equivalent workers in England in the same period.

Welsh Water Authority

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently employed by the Welsh water authority.

Mr. Mark Robinson: At 31 December 1985 there were 4,786 people employed by the Welsh water authority.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs in Wales he estimates will be created by the construction of a fixed link across the English Channel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No estimate is possible at present, but, when the link is completed, the improved communications provided should create new opportunities for businesses and industry in Wales.

Water Rates

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales by how much water rates have increased in the last five years in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the average for English authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The total increase in the average domestic water bill in Wales between 1981 and 1986 in cash terms is £37·15. The comparative figure for the English authorities is £25·09.

Public Bodies (Ministerial Appointments)

Mr. Ray Powell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of all bodies to which he has made appointments since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Mr. Ray Powell asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many persons he has appointed to public bodies in Wales since his appointment in 1979, either solely or jointly with other Departments; and if he will state the numbers of all political parties separately.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested in the first part of the question is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Records of appointees' political affiliations are not kept. In making appointments it is our policy to select the best person for the job bearing in mind all factors relevant to the post.

PRIME MINISTER

Westland plc

Q63. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister what action was taken on the night of Wednesday 8 January, when the then Secretary of State for Defence reported to her office that the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had urged the managing director of the leading company in the British Westland consortium to withdraw in the national interest.

The Prime Minister: Westland was fully discussed by the Cabinet on 9 January with the participation of both my right hon. Friend and my right hon. and learned Friend.

Gainsborough

Q12. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Gainsborough.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

Mr. Flannery asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

Mr. Bellingham asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall be addressing the National Farmers Union.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Tourism

Mr. Maclean asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he is taking to bring to the attention of farmers the grants which are available to diversify into tourism; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what expertise is being developed at local level to help and advise farmers who wish to take up a grant for tourism and crafts;

(3) what expertise on tourism marketing is being developed at a local level to enable his Department's officials to make decisions on the suitability of marketing plans, as described in his Department's booklet A.I.S. 6, "Tourism and Crafts", paragraph 28;

(4) if he will make a statement on liaison between his Department and the tourist boards over the operation of his Department's new grants for tourism and crafts.

Mrs. Fenner: My Department has published a comprehensive range of advisory leaflets on grants available under the agriculture improvement scheme and has arranged for wide publicity in the national and local press and at farming conferences, agricultural shows and so on.

My Department has a team of specialist advisers on farm tourism and crafts who maintain close contacts with the tourist boards and the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas and participate in the boards' development panels and the regional tourism steering committees of the Department of Employment.

MAFF booklet 2005—"Farmhouse and Self-catering Accommodation"—contains comprehensive information on the minimum voluntary standards recommended by the English Tourist Board. This booklet has gone to all farmers known to have an interest in tourism.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of the parliamentary answer to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 27 January, *Official Report*, column 404, about current European Economic Community import levies; and what extra cost would have been entailed in providing the information in the form requested.

Mr. Gummer: The cost of the parliamentary answer given was about £130. It is our custom, when appropriate, to refer hon. Members to the authoritative figures in the *Official Journal*, as not to do so would involve us in disproportionate cost. In this case the disproportionate cost would have arisen particularly from the large number of import levies for different presentations of imports and the conversions required.

Renewable Energy Systems

Mr. Key asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current capital grants available to farmers for installation of renewable energy systems; and if he will list such grants by number, value and type in each year since the grants were introduced.

Mrs. Fenner: Grants have been available since 1 October 1985 under the agriculture improvement scheme for the supply and installation of straw-burning boilers and furnaces, heat pumps, heat exchangers, wind- or water-powered pumps and generators, anaerobic digestors and solar heating panels.

The rates of grant are 15 per cent. in the lowlands and 30 per cent. in the less-favoured areas.

I regret that no information is available on the grants paid so far on each type of energy-saving facility.

Agricultural Expenditure

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the proposal by the European Commission that agricultural spending in 1986 should be further increased by £500 million and that a special fund of £2,000 million should be established for surplus disposal.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: We have yet to see a detailed proposal for an addition of £500 million to the 1986 Community budget. It remains a key objective that the agreed financial guideline is held to. The Commission has made no proposals for a special £2,000 million fund.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Record Industry

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the overseas earnings of the British record industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information distinguishing royalties and other overseas earnings by the record industry is not available. In 1985 (provisional) United Kingdom exports of records were valued at £62 million (fob) and exports of recorded tapes for the reproduction of music were valued at £10 million (fob).

United States (Discussions)

Mr. Park asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with the Government of the United States of America about industry and trade policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry visited the United States in October last year to discuss a range of issues with members of the United States Administration, and my hon. and learned Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for corporate and consumer affairs visited the United States last November to discuss issues relating to the provision of financial services. Officials in this Department have also had discussions with their United States counterparts.

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply of 29 January to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, *Official Report*, column *534*, what has been the percentage change in real terms in the salary bill of the national weights and measures laboratory over the period 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Howard: The salary bill of the national weights and measures laboratory expressed in real terms (that is, based on movements in the retail price index) has increased by 12·5 per cent. over the period 1979-85.

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what savings he expects to achieve in the labour costs and overheads of the move of the national weights and measures laboratory from Chapter street to Teddington; and to what extent these will be reflected in lower charges to weighing machine manufacturers for pattern examination.

Mr. Howard: Both labour costs and overheads are expected to reduce following the move of the national weights and measures laboratory to Teddington, but the extent of these savings is not yet known. Fees for pattern examination will be set to recover fully the costs incurred in carrying out the work.

Weighing Machines

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the income his Department received in each of the years since 1979 from charges made on weighing machines and scale manufacturers for the inspection and certification of new machines offered for type approval.

Mr. Howard: Information is not readily available in the form requested to distinguish between scale and weighing machine manufacturers and other manufacturers. However the totals for all types of equipment are:

Total income from new submissions and variants

	£
1979-80	32,618
1980-81	88,795
1981-82	112,207
1982-83	137,290
1983-84	222,486
1984-85	209,774

Implements of Torture

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the export of specially designed implements of torture and the export of items where there is reasonable cause to believe that they may be used, directly or indirectly, as implements of torture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: It would not be practicable to control exports of the large range of items in common use which might also be misused as implements of torture. However, it is not our policy to allow the export of items which in our view have a specific application in this field.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what control he exercises over the export of specially designed implements of torture.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have powers under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1985 to control the export of certain items which are specially designed to be used for repressive purposes.

Daya Nuclear Plant

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why officials of banks involved in the financing of the Daya nuclear power plant have been required to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Butcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Systime plc (Takeover)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the proposed takeover by DEC of Systime plc, Leeds, to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has made representations to the United States Secretary for Commerce on the trading practices leading up to the takeover of Systime plc, Leeds, by DEC Inc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. The sale of part of the Systime business to DEC is entirely a commercial matter for the two companies.

British Leyland

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at what time, on Thursday 6 February, copies of his statement to the House on British Leyland were first made available by his Department to the media.

Mr. Channon: Copies of my statement to the House on BL were made available to the House of Commons Press Gallery when I made the statement at 16.55 pm on 6 February. My press office then made the text available in response to media inquiries.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries there were from local exporters concerning export credits insurance in each of the Export Credits Guarantee Department regional offices in 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: The following table provides details of the number of credit limit inquiries received by each regional office of the Export Credits Guarantee Department:

Regional office	*Applications January 1984 to December 1984*	*Applications January 1985 to December 1985*
1. Belfast	1,825	2,004
2. Birmingham	22,174	22,195
3. Bristol	12,748	11,969
4. Cambridge	19,887	19,026
5. City	21,659	19,792
6. Croydon	20,519	19,950
7. Glasgow	8,591	8,886
8. Leeds	23,543	24,885
9. Manchester	17,614	18,318
TOTAL	148,470	147,025

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of staff employed in the regional office network of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: The regional office network of the Export Credits Guarantee Department has a complement of 392 including 18 located in the Cardiff headquarters engaged in regional work.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implications for the Export Credits Guarantee Department's regional office network of the management review of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: The implementation of the recommendations of the management review of the Export Credits Guarantee Department is still at an early stage and it is not yet possible to determine the overall impact on the regional

offices. The review does recommend that certain activities currently undertaken by the regional offices should be centralised to the department's headquarters in Cardiff, but it also recommends an increased marketing effort, which is likely to require a substantial input from the regional offices. There are no plans at present to close any regional office.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is his intention to strengthen the regional office network of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: The implementation of the recommendations of the management review of the Export Credits Guarantee Department is still at an early stage and it is not yet possible to determine the overall impact on the regional offices. The review does recommend that certain activities currently undertaken by the regional offices should be centralised to the department's headquarters in Cardiff, but it also recommends an increased marketing effort, which is likely to require a substantial input from the regional offices. There are no plans at present to close any regional office.

ENERGY

North Sea Oil

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy what studies his Department has made of the relationship between the quantity of United Kingdom North Sea oil produced and the price for North Sea oil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The price of oil on the world market, including North sea oil, is determined by the balance of demand and supply. The level of oil production on the UKCS is only one element and accounts for some 6 per cent. of world oil production. Over the last two years there has been no observable relationship between world oil prices, which have undergone major fluctuations, and UKCS production, which has been broadly stable.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what investigations he has made and what conclusions he has reached concerning the cost of services to the Inner London education authority which are currently provided by the Greater London council; and what liability he expects to be placed on the Inner London education authority after 31 March next.

Mr. Chris Patten: Services costing in total some £200 million a year are provided to the present Inner London education authority by the Greater London council. In setting and redetermining an expenditure level for the new ILEA for 1986-87, my right hon. Friend considered that in general the cost of services to the new ILEA should be no greater than the cost of services from the GLC. When redetermining the expenditure level in December, he added £7·5 million to it in respect of extra costs which he expected to arise from the abolition of the GLC: these were for the most part for services which had been provided by the GLC but had not been recharged to the present ILEA.

School Governing Bodies

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science why he is unwilling to make explicit statutory provision for the representation of commerce and industry on school governing bodies.

Mr. Dunn: As I explained in answer to my hon. Friend's question on 4 February at column *116*, governing bodies' proposed new duty to co-opt additional governors will serve to broaden their membership. They will be urged to secure the appropriate wider representation of the communities served by their schools. It would be inappropriate to predetermine such co-options since adequate representation of some relevant interests, such as industry and commerce, may well arise indirectly through the ordinary election and appointment of governors.

Teachers

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he plans any financial or other initiatives to promote the recruitment by education authorities of a greater number of teachers of physics and mathematics to secondary schools on the basis of salary levels higher than those currently being paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Government have already accepted the case for an increase in teachers' pay to recruit, retain and motivate sufficient teachers of the right quality. We had the shortages of teachers in such subjects as mathematics and physics very much in mind in making our offer of additional resources for teachers' pay conditional upon a reform of the pay structure which would give employers greater flexibility to take account of the demand for specific skills and qualifications. I hope that forthcoming negotiations will soon make sufficient progress towards these objectives to justify the release of these resources. In the meantime we have sought to encourage more people to enter teacher training in these subjects, through the offer of bursaries worth £1,200 a year (tax free), to students entering one or two year courses in mathematics, physics or CDT.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ukraine (Political Prisoners)

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Soviet Government about their use of torture against political prisoners in the Ukraine.

Mr. Renton: We have repeatedly made clear our concern at the treatment of many individuals throughout the Soviet Union who are imprisoned or otherwise detained because of their political or other beliefs. My right hon. and learned Friend has regularly raised such issues with his opposite numbers in the Soviet Union. We shall continue to press the Soviet Union to honour its international commitments on human rights under the universal declaration of human rights, the international covenant on civil political rights and the Helsinki final act.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorist Offences (Vehicles)

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the years 1983, 1984 and 1985 the following details *(a)* the number of vehicles hijacked or taken and *(b)* the number not recovered at the end of each year in each of the following police districts, separately: Musgrave street, Springfield road, Tennent street, North Queen street, Mountpottinger, Castlereagh, Newtownhards, Newry, Portadown, Armagh, Enniskillen, Omagh, Strand road, Coleraine, Ballymena and Antrim.

Mr. Scott: Information for the years 1983 and 1984 was given in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 12 February 1985 at column *105-6*. The available information for 1985 is as follows:

Division	*Divisional Headquarters*	*Vehicles taken or hijacked*
A	Musgrave street	1,976
B	Springfield road	1,442
D	North Queen street	1,236
E	Strandtown	617
G	Newtownhards	137
H	Armagh	250
J	Portadown	410
K	Cookstown	75
L	Enniskillen	40
N	Strand road	274
O	Coleraine	71
P	Ballymena	321
	TOTAL	6,849

Notes:

(1) 710 vehicles were not recovered. A breakdown of this figure by division is not available.

(2) On 1 October 1983, the number of RUC Divisions was reduced from 16 to 12 and Divisional boundaries were reorganised. As a result there were no longer divisions with Headquarters at Tennant street, Castlereagh, Omagh or Antrim.

(3) Unlike previous years the totals for 1985 do not include articles of plant and machinery. In that year 149 were recorded as stolen, of which at 31 December 110 had not been recovered.

Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the cost to date of the security at the Maryfield premises of the secretariat of the intergovernmental conference;

(2) what is the cost to date of maintaining, fortifying and repairing damage to the Maryfield premises of the secretariat of the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Tom King: The actual payments to 31 January 1986 were:

	£
Alterations and renovations	16,000
Security works and repairs	92,000
RUC personnel	55,000
Total	163,000

Work is still in progress. No maintenance costs have yet been incurred.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is the head of the secretariat of the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Tom King: Article 3 of the Anglo-Irish agreement provides that both Governments would establish a secretariat to service the intergovernmental conference. There is therefore no single head but there are joint staffs whose work is ultimately the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Minister designated as the permanent Irish ministerial representative. It would not be appropriate for me to name members of the secretariat.

Cash Limits

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for the financial year 1985-86 for the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr. Tom King: Subject to Parliamentary approval to the necessary Supplementary Estimate the cash limit for the Northern Ireland Office law, order, protective and miscellaneous services vote—class XVII, vote 1—for 1985-86 is being increased by £2,500,000 from £434,682,000 to £437,182,000 to meet additional expenditure arising from a higher level of police overtime activity and increased costs associated with recent political developments in Northern Ireland. The increase is being met from the reserve and therefore does not add to the total of public expenditure.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is his policy that the chairman of the Police Federation of Northern Ireland shall be prevented from representing by means of public statements and interviews with the media the federation's views on matters pertaining to the welfare and efficiency of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to the reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *251*.]: The Police Association for Northern Ireland of which the Police Federation is a constituent part, is empowered to represent members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in all matters affecting their welfare and efficiency. However, the direction and control of the RUC is a matter for the Chief Constable.

TRANSPORT

A11 (Accidents)

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents have taken place on the A11 in the village of Elveden, Suffolk, in each of the past 10 years; and how many of these have involved personal injury or death.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Accident statistics at Elveden, Suffolk on the A11 between Norfolk county border to B1106 junction are as follows:

	Fatal	*Injury*	*Total*
1979	2	5	7
1980	1	4	5

	Fatal	Injury	Total
1981	0	5	5
1982	0	5	5
1983	0	4	4
1984	0	5	5
1985	1	4	5

Data for the years before 1979 could only be achieved at disproportionate cost. Accidents which do not involve injuries are not recorded.

Rail Services (Windsor and Maidenhead)

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from residents of the Windsor and Maidenhead area about the effect on rail services of the reduction in the public service obligation grant to British Rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: None.

Disabled People (Parking Bays)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will specify which regulations lay down conditions for marking parking bays for disabled people.

Mr. Ridley: The conditions for marking parking bays for disabled people are laid down in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981, (SI 1981/859). Diagram 661 prescribes the upright sign to be used at parking places reserved for disabled badge holders and diagram 1028.1 prescribes a road marking to define the area of the parking bay. The marking includes the word "DISABLED" painted on the road surface. There is no specific requirement in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981 for the upright sign and the road marking to be used together.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications of the High Court ruling on the case of Mr. Viner of Ernstord Grange regarding the marking of parking bays; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The Department is seeking but has not yet received a detailed report of the judgment. I shall consider the implications as soon as this is received.

Airports (Passenger Movements)

Mr. Silvester asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each British Airports Authority and local authority airport the number of passengers arriving and departing from the airport according to the area of the United Kingdom which was their original point of departure or their ultimate destination.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Information for 1984 is available in the Civil Aviation Authority publication "UK Airports" table 16. A copy is in the Library.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list showing the numbers of staff in his Department, categorised by the type of transport mode with which their work is concerned, and in addition categorised by the administrative division used within his Department.

Mr. Ridley: The information is provided below:

1 January 1986

Transport mode and directorate	*Staff in post*
Roads	
Highways Policy and Programme	86
Highways Contracts, Administration and Maintenance	154
Chief Highways Engineer	279·5
Traffic and Greater London Roads	176
Regional Offices	1,000·5
Public Transport, London and Metropolitan Counties	22
Passenger Transport	31
International Transport	32
Road Safety	76
Transport and Road Research Laboratory	611
Total	2,468
Highways licensing, testing and taxation	
Road and Vehicle Safety (driver and vehicle testing)	3,169·5
Traffic Area Offices	1,139·5
Driver and Vehicle Licensing	5,527
Freight and Bus Licensing	323
Total	10,159
Railways	
Total rail	72
Air	
Civil Aviation Policy	67
International Aviation	50
Accident Investigation Branch	37
Total	154
Sea	
Shipping Policy	51
Marine (including Her Majesty's Coastguard)	1,137·5
Total	1,188·5
Total central administration	465
Total DTp	14,506·5

Lorries (Accidents)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents were caused in each of the last five years by loads, portions of loads, or equipment falling off moving lorries; and if he will make a statemen on current enforcement.

Mr. Ridley: Full information is not available. The number of accidents where a dislodged vehicle load was reported were as follows:

Year	*Number of accidents*
1980	219
1981	241
1982	286
1983	273
1984	236

The Department has issued a code of practice advising operators on the correct securing of loads and equipment to vehicles. Enforcement of the relevant regulations is a matter for the police.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

Mr. Pawsey asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing annual per capita expenditure *(a)* in real terms, *(b)* in cash terms, *(c)* using 1979 as a base of 100 since 1979 on (i) the National Health Service, (ii) defence, (iii) education, (iv) civil research and (v) defence research.

Mr. MacGregor: The available figures are summarised in the following tables:

(a) *Per capita expenditure in real terms** *United Kingdom*

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Defence	250	255	260	278	287	304	308
Education and Science	296	304	300	302	304	301	297
National Health Service†	216	234	238	243	246	252	254
Civil research and development	35	36	38	37	37	‡38	n.a.
Defence research and development	35	37	36	34	37	‡39	n.a.

* Cash figures adjusted for general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator at market prices, base year 1984-85=100.
† These figures are gross of NHS charges and relate to Great Britain.
‡ Provisional.
n.a. = Not available.

(b) *Per capita expenditure in cash terms* *United Kingdom*

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Defence	164	199	223	255	275	304	323
Education and Science	194	236	257	276	291	301	312
National Health Service*	141	182	204	222	235	252	266
Civil research and development	23	28	32	34	36	†38	n.a.
Defence research and development	23	29	31	31	35	†39	n.a.

* The figures are gross of NHS charges and relate to Great Britain.
† Provisional.
n.a. = Not available.

(c) *Per capita expenditure in cash terms (1979-80=100)* *United Kingdom*

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
Defence	100	121	136	155	168	185	197
Education and Science	100	122	132	142	150	155	161
National Health Service*	100	129	145	157	167	179	189
Civil research and development	100	122	139	148	157	†165	n.a.
Defence research and development	100	126	135	135	152	†170	n.a.

* The figures are gross of NHS charges and relate to Great Britain.
† Provisional.
n.a. = Not available.

State-owned Companies (Bids)

Mr. Franks asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many management and management-employee bids to buy state-owned companies there have been since 1979; and how many of these have been accepted by the Government.

Mr. Moore: There have been 13 successful and four unsuccessful management and management-employee bids for state-owned companies, details of which are listed below. The role of Government Departments in evaluating bids for companies owned by nationalised industries and other public sector bodies varies according to the particular circumstances of each sale.

Successful bids

National Freight Corporation	
Britflex Resin Systems Limited	(British Steel Corporation subsidiary)
Coated Electrodes Limited	(British Steel Corporation subsidiary)
Brooke Marine Limited	(British Shipbuilders subsidiary)
Swan Hunter Limited	(British Shipbuilders subsidiary)
Tyne Shiprepair Limited	(British Shipbuilders subsidiary)
Vosper Shiprepair Limited	(British Shipbuilders subsidiary)
Vosper Thornycroft Limited*	(British Shipbuilders subsidiary)
Hoverspeed Limited	(50 per cent. British Rail shareholding)
Bull Motors Limited	(100 per cent. British Technology Group shareholding)
QI Europe Limited	(51 per cent. British Technology Group shareholding)
Inveresk Research International Limited	(90 per cent. Scottish Development Agency shareholding)
Strathclyde Process Engineering Limited	(92·5 per cent. Scottish Development Agency shareholding)

Unsuccessful bids

Vosper Thorneycroft Limited*	(British Shipbuilders subsidiary)
British Transport Hotels Limited	(British Rail subsidiary)
Sealink Limited	(British Rail subsidiary)
INSAC Products Limited	(100 per cent. British Technology Group shareholding)

* Two management groups submitted rival bids for Vosper Thorneycroft.
One was successful.

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total Exchequer revenue derived through income tax payments by self-employed persons in each of the last 15 years for which figures are available; what is this figure as a percentage of total income tax payments in each of those years; and what was the average per capita amount of income tax paid by self-employed persons in each of those years.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

European Community Budget

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proportions of the 1986 European Community budget approved by the Council of Ministers devoted to *(a)* agriculture guarantee, *(b)* agriculture guidance, *(c)* regional fund, *(d)* social fund, *(e)* research and investment, and *(f)* aid; and if he will give for each of the above categories the percentage increase in the payment appropriations for these funds over the 1985 budget.

Mr. Brooke: The information set out in the table is taken from the 1986 European Communities budget which was adopted by the European Parliament on 18 December 1985.

	Percentage share of the total 1986 Budget	*Percentage increase in payment appropriations over the 1985 Budget*
Agricultural Guarantee	63·1	5·3
Agricultural Guidance	2·4	15·3
Regional Fund	6·7	38·1
Social Fund	6·1	44·2
Research and Investment	1·9	11·9
Aid	3·4	9·9

The 1986 Budget includes provision for enlargement.

The Council of Ministers and individual member states, including the United Kingdom, are challenging the budget as adopted by the European Parliament before the European court.

Indexation

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the manner of the answer given on 12 February 1985, *Official Report*, columns *145-46*, he will update and publish the table detailing the breakdown costs or yields of reinstating the indexed 1978-79 tax regime, taking the 1985-86 income tax base.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1985, c. *83*]: If the 1978-79 income tax allowances and thresholds were indexed to 1985-86 levels by reference to the statutory formula and applied to the 1985-86 income tax base, the direct revenue effect would be an additional yield of about £6·2 billion in a full year.

The levels of the main allowances and thresholds, compared with the actual 1985-86 values, would be:

Personal allowances	*Indexed 1978-79 regime* £	*1985-86* £
Single and wife's earned income allowance	1,875	2,205
Married man's allowance	2,925	3,455
Additional personal allowance	1,050	1,250
Aged single allowance	2,480	2,690
Aged married allowances	3,955	4,255
Aged income limit	7,700	8,800

Rate of tax (percentage)	*Bands of taxable income Indexed 1978-79 regime* £	*1985-86* £
25	0-1,450	—
30	—	0-16,200
33	1,451-15,300	—
40	15,301-17,300	16,201-19,200
45	17,301-19,300	19,201-24,400
50	19,301-21,300	24,401-32,300
55	21,301-24,200	32,301-40,200
60	24,201-27,100	Over 40,200
65	27,101-31,000	—
70	31,001-35,800	—
75	35,801-46,300	—
83	Over 46,300	—

Investment Income Surcharge: Indexed 1978-79 regime

Bands of net investment income		
Non-aged £	*Aged* £	*Rate of surcharge (percentage)*
0-3,250	0-4,800	Exempt
3,251-4,300	4,801-5,800	10
Over 4,300	Over 5,800	15

Investment income surcharge was abolished in 1984-85.

Taking the 1985-86 income tax base as given, the direct revenue effects of reinstating the indexed 1978-79 tax regime can be broken down as follows:

	Yield(+) Cost(−) £ million
Reductions in personal allowances	+3,150
Reintroduction of reduced rate band at 25p	−1,625
Increase in basic rate of 3p	+2,650
Reduction in basic rate limit of £800	+75
Changes in higher rate thresholds up to 60 per cent.	+500
Reintroduction of higher rates above 60 per cent.	+710
Reintroduction of investment income surcharge	+740
Total	6,200

In the table above, the effect of each change has been calculated on the assumption that each of the changes which precede it has already been made.

THE ARTS

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

Mr. Wareing asked the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about the future of the Royal Liverpool philharmonic orchestra; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I have received a number of letters about the orchestra's future, which is a matter for the Arts Council. I am assured by the council that the future funding of the orchestra is not in doubt.

South Bank Arts Complex

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts what was the full cost to the Arts Council of the fact-finding visits abroad made by Mr. Richard Pulford and Mr. Ronald Grierson in preparation for assuming responsibility for the South Bank arts complex; and which countries were visited.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: The total cost to the Arts Council for fact-finding visits to the United States of America, Canada and Australia was £8,024, but only part of Mr. Ronald Grierson's costs were borne by the council.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts what reason was given by the Arts Council for the salary difference between the posts of director of arts co-ordination and general director (administration) on the South Bank.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: The general director (administration) is the senior officer. He will be in overall charge, under the chairman of the South bank board, of all South bank activities. The general director (arts) is responsible for developing an artistic policy for the arts centre.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Cot Deaths

Mr. Galley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action in preventing cot deaths has been taken by his Department and the professions since the Knowelden report and the conference on this subject sponsored by his Department in March 1985.

Mr. Whitney: The Knowelden research was commissioned in an attempt to identify preventable causes of infant deaths. The study, which has been widely distributed, showed that a number of the deaths were in fact partly or wholly explicable, but in general no specific actions were identified that could have prevented many of the deaths certified as cot deaths. The conference confirmed these findings.

However, there were a number of more general recommendations. Some concerned maternity services and related pathology services, and the Government have already emphasised to health authorities the importance of these through the reports of the maternity services advisory committee. We have expressed to the Medical Research Council the importance we attach to the need for further research into finding the causes of infant deaths for which full post-mortems offer no explanation. We are considering ways of improving the information about cot deaths received through death certificates, and the availability of the results of coroners' post mortems to other clinicians who are investigating such deaths. We shall be looking for ways in which services in the community to the very young can be improved in the light of the consultations on the primary health care discussion document, and the review of community nursing. Finally I am aware that the British Paediatric Association, the Health Visitor's Association, and the Royal College of General Practitioners are considering in their joint working party, the points made in the report about the professional care of children under one. Separately, I understand the British Paediatric Association are considering the question of the care of sick children immediately after admission to hospital.

It would be unrealistic to expect speedy solutions to the tragedy of cot deaths but we are hopeful that continuing action of the kind I have indicated will enable progress to be made.

Information Leaflets

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what priority he is giving to translating his Department's information leaflets and claim forms into the Welsh, Greek, Turkish, Chinese, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujurati, Hindi and Urdu languages respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: A selection of DHSS information leaflets and claim forms is produced in Welsh by the Department's Wales and South Western Region in response to local requirements. Also in April 1985 the Department introduced "Which Benefit", a comprehensive leaflet on social security benefit, in the Bengali, Chinese, Gujerati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu languages. Departmental evaluation of these projects is still in progress.

Hospital Managers

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what help he will provide to hospital managers to enable them to comply with their duties under the Mental Health Act 1983, section I 3.2 in providing patients with information leaflets and forms in their own language.

Mr. Whitney: I explained the background to this matter in my replies on 29 January to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) at columns *560-62*. I have no reason to doubt the ability of National Health Service authorities to find a means of discharging their responsibility to give the required information to any individual detained patients who do not understand English. We have no evidence of widespread difficulties, but the Mental Health Act Commission know that we are prepared to consider evidence of difficulties which might require action centrally.

Hospital Projects

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by region, project and content, for London *(a)* hospital projects completed since 1979 and costing more than £1 million, *(b)* hospital projects costing over £1 million under construction and *(c)* hospital projects in design stage costing more than £1 million.

Mr. Whitney: Following is the information requested for capital schemes each costing over £2 million. There are many other smaller schemes at the various stages, but details of these are not held centrally. Health authorities have not been required to register schemes costing between £2 million and £5 million with the Department and information on this category may therefore be incomplete.

Capital schemes costing over £2 million

	Scheme	*Content*
North West Thames		
In planning	Clayponds Geriatric Unit	ESMI Nursing section and Day Hospital
	Ealing Maternity Department	Wards and clinic
In design	Central Middlesex Psychiatric Unit	90 Beds Mental Illness
Under construction	St. Mary's W2, Phase 1B	338 Beds, supporting services
Completed since 1979	Charing Cross Hospital North Block	Accident/Emergency, X-Ray, Operating Theatres
	St. Charles Hospital	116 Beds Elderly/Mental Illness
	St. Mary's W2, Phase 1A	60 Beds Mental Illness
North East Thames		
In planning	Coppetts Wood	12 Beds Infectious Diseases
In design	Whittington Redevelopment Phase 1	196 Beds, supporting services
Under construction	Harold Wood Hospital Phase 1	112 Beds, supporting services
	Homerton (Eastern) Phase 1	428 Beds, supporting services
Completed since 1979	London Hospital Clinical Building, Phase 1	Accident/Emergency, X-Ray, Operating Theatres
	Newham Hospital Phase 1 (Nucleus)	293 Beds, supporting services
	Newham Hospital Phase 2 (Nucleus)	101 Beds, supporting services
South East Thames		
In design	Bassetts Residential Centre	Mental Health Services
Under construction	Lewisham DGH, Phase 1A	Out-patients Department, Operating Theatres
	Lewisham DGH, Phase 1B	Rehabilitation, Accident/Emergency, Maternity
South West Thames		
Under construction	St. George's Block H, Phase 2A	360 Beds, Out-patients Department, supporting services
Completed since 1979	Croydon Mayday DGH (Nucleus)	330 Beds, supporting services
	Queen Mary's Roehampton	20 Beds Burns Unit
	St. George's Block G1, Phase 2	Medical School
	St. George's Blocks G2 and F, Phase 2	Medical School
Non RHA		
In design	Moorfields Eye Hospital Redevelopment, Phase 2B	41 Beds, Special clinics, Professorial Unit and supporting services
	National Heart and Chest Centre	186 Beds, supporting services
Under construction	Hammersmith Hospital Redevelopment, Phase 1	60 Beds, supporting services
Completed since 1979	Moorfields Eye Hospital City Road Development Phase 1	30 Beds, Accident/Emergency and supporting services

Generic Drugs

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce regulations which provide that only generic equivalents shall be prescribed in the National Health Service for drugs that are patent expired.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have no plans to do so.

NHS (Residential Places)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has now received a list of National Health Service residential places for National Health Service staff from each of the authorities he asked to submit plans by 31 December 1985; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing those that he has now approved for sale, together with the submission of the estimated sale values of the authority concerned.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Department is scrutinising the plans regions have submitted for the disposal of surplus residential accommodation and I have not yet approved a regional plan.

Health Authorities (Chairmen)

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will identify the chairmen appointed for the Wakefield (Eastern) area health authority since April 1982; and if he will state what salary they received annually for that duty;

(2) if he will identify the chairmen of the Yorkshire regional health authority since April 1982; and what salary they received annually for that duty;

(3) if he will identify the chairmen appointed for the Wakefield (Western) area health authority since April 1982; and what salary they received annually for that duty.

Mr. Hayhoe: Sir William Tweddle was chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority until his death in October 1982. Mr. Bryan Askew, the current chairman, was appointed from 1 March 1983. On 1 April 1982 Wakefield (Eastern) and Wakefield (Western) area health authorities became Pontefract and Wakefield district health authorities respectively. Councillor Roy Widdowson, the current chairman of Pontefract DHA, and Sir Jack Smart, the current chairman of Wakefield DHA, were both appointed from 1 April 1982. These are not salaried appointments although chairmen are entitled to receive an honorarium or to claim financial loss allowance. The rates of honorarium payable from 1 April 1982 are as follows:

From	Annual amount payable £
1 April 1982	7,590
1 August 1983	8,122
1 January 1984	8,424
1 April 1984	8,676
1 November 1984	8,970

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to seek to enable YTS trainees to qualify for unemployment benefit after they have completed their training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: To receive unemployment benefit a person must satisfy two conditions. First he must have actually paid a certain amount of Class 1 contributions at some time; and second, he must have paid or been credited with enough contributions in the relevant tax year. YTS trainees receive a training allowance, not earnings, and they are not in class 1 employment. They therefore do not pay contributions but they are given credits for the training period which assist them to satisfy the second contribution condition. A YTS trainee will therefore receive unemployment benefit only if he paid enough contributions before commencing training to satisfy the first contribution condition. The Government have no plans to alter this situation. Supplementary benefit, which is not dependent on contribution conditions, is available to trainees who are unemployed on completion of their training.

Mr. Robert Banks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the benefit to the Exchequer of reduced unemployment benefits being paid to those who undertake duties in the Territorial Army volunteer reserve.

Mr. Major: A reservist who is in receipt of unemployment benefit loses benefit of up to £5·07 for himself, or £8·21 if he has an adult dependant, for each day, other than Sundays, on which he undertakes duties in the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve and earns more than £2. Supplementary benefit is reduced by the amount by which TA pay exceeds £32 in a month. Both benefits are withdrawn for the period of the annual camp. Information on the total amount of benefit withheld as a result of these procedures is not available.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his latest estimate of the number of children of school age for whom family income supplement is currently in payment.

Mr. Newton: At October 1985, the latest date for which information is available, there were 261,000 children aged 5 to 15 in families receiving family income supplement. There were a further 27,000 children aged 16 to 18 still engaged in full-time non-advanced education.

Allowances

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people received constant attendance allowance at the latest available date.

Mr. Newton: At 30 September 1982 (the latest date for which figures are available), 2,250 people were in receipt of constant attendance allowance.

Home Helps

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* those local authorities which imposed a minimum charge for a home help service provided to supplementary benefit claimants.

Mr. Whitney: The latest available information about local authorities in England who impose a minimum charge for their home help service is set out in columns 215 and 216 of the "Personal Social Services Statistics Actuals 1983-84" published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, a copy of which is in the Library. No information is separately collected by the Department about such charges to supplementary benefit recipients.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will direct the Social Services Inspectorate in its review of social services provision to investigate the new role in personal care of the frail and elderly undertaken by home helps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The social services inspectorate's inspection of home help services is concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of those services and will include an assessment of the personal care being provided by home helps for frail and elderly people in the participating authorities.

Prescriptions

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost of extending free prescriptions to those whose medical condition requires continuous and repeated prescriptions beyond a three month period.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that separate figures to estimate the cost are not available.

Blind and Partially Sighted People (Register)

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he intends to publish updated statistics on the numbers of registered blind or partially sighted people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The local authority returns giving information about the numbers of people registered as blind and partially sighted which would normally have been asked for in March 1985 have been deferred until March 1986, and we plan to publish them in the autumn of this year.

In 1985-86 the BD8 return, which provides details on the causes of blindness or partial sight for new cases, has been extended, as it is in every fifth year, to cover persons of working age. The reason for the exceptional departure from the normal three-yearly cycle of registration returns is to provide a once for all check of the response rate of the form BD8 for this age group. Subsequent registration returns will revert to the normal cycle, the next one relating to the position at 31 March 1988.

Disabled People (Statistics)

Mr. Carter-Jones: asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimates he has of the numbers of disabled people in each category of disability for which records are kept; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The latest available data about the number of persons registered with social services departments as physically or sensorily handicapped are set out in the table. Registration with social services departments is not a reliable guide to the overall incidence of disability, as registration is voluntary and local authorities may renew and update their records on different timescales. There is no information held centrally about the total number of mentally disordered people.

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is conducting on behalf of the Department a national survey of people with significant disabilities to obtain comprehensive and up-to-date information about their numbers, circumstances and needs. The results are expected to be published in 1988.

England—Number of Registered Handicapped

As at 31 March	*Type of Register*	*Registration Category*	*Number of Persons Registered*
1982	Blind and partially sighted	Blind	111,729
		Partially sighted	58,003
		Total	169,732
1983	Deaf and hard of hearing*	Deaf with speech	16,113
		Deaf without speech	15,722
		Hard of hearing	47,179
		Total	79,014
1984	General classes* †	Very severely handicapped	71,604
		Severely handicapped	454,411
		Other	576,535
		Total	1,102,550

* Includes persons multiply handicapped and therefore on other registers.
† But excludes persons on the Register of the Blind.

NHS (Pay)

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how regional and district health authorities are expected to find the extra cost to them of nationally determined pay settlements.

Mr. Hayhoe: Health authorities are expected to meet both service requirements and pay increases from the allocations made to them by Government and from their growing cost improvement programmes.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many exceptionally severe weather payments were made to claimants in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland in each year since 1980.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is as follows:

Single Payments of Supplementary Benefit for Extra Fuel used During Periods of Exceptionally Severe Weather

Thousands

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Scotland	*	—	60	—	—	—
England	*	—	200	—	—	159
Wales	*	—	19	—	—	11
Total			278			170

* Not available.
Figures rounded to the nearest thousand and may not sum as a result.

Figures for Northern Ireland should be obtained from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what current weekly amounts are deducted from housing benefit for *(a)* heating, *(b)* cooking, *(c)* hot water and *(d)* lighting.

Mr. Major: The treatment of charges for heating, hot water, cooking or lighting varies between standard and certificated housing benefit cases.

Standard Cases

In standard cases, amenity charges for fuel are excluded from assistance. Gross rent is reduced by the amount of the charge or, if not known, by an amount which the local authority considers fairly attributable to the amenity.

Certified cases

In certified cases (that is people in receipt of qualifying supplementary benefit), the weekly amount deducted from rent varies according to the actual amenity charge and whether full or partial heating is provided. Where the claimant pays a charge which varies (or is subsequently adjusted) according to actual consumption, the amount of the charge is deducted from the rent. Where the claimant is required to pay a fixed amenity charge as a condition of the tenancy and the charge provides for the full fuel needs of the home, the deduction made is the actual charge subject to the following limits:

	£
heating	6.55
hot water	0.80
cooking	0.80
lighting	0.50

Where, however, a claimant can choose to pay a fixed charge for fuel, the whole amount is deducted from the rent.

A reduced deduction is normally made where a charge is made for partial heating.

Statistics (Publication)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans he has to publish a volume of Health and Personal Social Service Statistics for England in 1986.

Mr. Whitney: Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England is now to be published on an annual basis. It is planned to publish the 1986 edition during the summer of 1986.

Drugs Initiative

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the specially allocated drugs initiative money, in *(a)* 1984-85 and *(b)* 1985-86 has been allocated to the support of projects in (i) the Greater London area and (ii) inner London.

Mr. Whitney: A total of £3·6 million has been allocated under the Department's drugs initiative to projects serving Greater London, of which £0·35 million was made available for 1984-85 and £0·75 million for 1985-86. It is not possible to identify separately the proportion of the allocations which relate to inner London.

Mucodyne

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the hon. Member for Central Fife can expect replies to the questions he put in his letter to the Department in early January concerning the drug Carbocisteine (Mucodyne).

Mr. Whitney: I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday.

City Roads Drugs Project

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what financial support his Department has made available to the City Roads drugs crisis intervention project in each of the three years 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86; and what contribution is intended for 1986-87.

Mr. Whitney: DHSS pump-priming funding of the City Roads drug misuse project ended in 1984-85 with a contribution of £39,600. £79,200 was provided in 1983-84.

The Department is currently considering an application under the drugs initiative for a substantial capital grant towards the renovation of City Roads' premises.

Health Authorities (Statistics)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what population figures are used by health authorities for their budgeting and planning.

Mr. Whitney: Regional health authorities are supplied by the Department with figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys giving mid-year population estimates and projections for each of their districts. It is, however, for regional and district health authorities themselves to decide what use to make of this and other available data in discharging their budgeting and planning responsibilities. Comprehensive information on their use of such data is not collected centrally.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what population figures are used for planning and budgetary purposes for the Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry that this information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may like to obtain it from the chairman of the Wessex regional health authority.

Arthritis Drugs

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the numbers of deaths each year due to the effects of all anti-arthritic drugs.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 30 January 1986, c. *620*]: Information on deaths attributed to medicinal products is available from death certificates, from reports of adverse reactions and from professional reports based on original research. However, none of these sources provides data on which to base the estimate requested by the right hon. Member.

I am advised that death certificates are a poor indicator of deaths related to medicinal products as the cause of death is usually given as a medical condition, not the effects of the medicine. Adverse reaction reports to the Committee on Safety of Medicines provide data on drug-related deaths in the United Kingdom, but for two important reasons they cannot be used to estimate total deaths caused by medicines. First, adverse reaction reports are reports of associations and do not necessarily indicate a causal relationship between the medicine and reaction. Second, the committee acknowledges that there is under-reporting of adverse reactions but the extent of this is not known.

I am not aware of any published professional research which provides an estimate of deaths caused by all groups of drugs used to treat or alleviate the symptoms of arthritis. However, I understand that, studies, made in the Nottingham area, lead to estimates that deaths from upper gastro-intestinal bleeding caused by one of the groups, the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (but not including aspirin), may amount to over 200 a year in the United Kingdom.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines is currently undertaking a further special review of available evidence on the safety of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs including the Nottingham study.

War Pensions

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, if, pursuant to the answer of 3 February regarding disregard on war pensions, he will list those branches of the Royal British Legion which can readily be identified as having made representations on the subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *218*]: Representations from the following Royal British Legion branches have been identified:

Royal British Legion Scotland—Edinburgh and Lothian Area Council
Royal British Legion —Kenilworth branch
Royal British Legion —Firs branch, Birmingham

Regular representations have also been received from the National Headquarters of the Royal British Legion and the Royal British Legion Scotland following resolutions taken at their annual conferences.

DEFENCE

Tornado Mk2

6. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado Mk2s have been delivered to the Royal Air Force to date.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Sixteen Tornado F-2 aircraft have been delivered to the RAF to date.

Molesworth

7. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to pay an official visit to Molesworth.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to do so.

48. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now halt building developments at Molesworth.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Visiting Forces Act

20. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about the operation of the Visiting Forces Act.

Mr. Stanley: Since the beginning of 1985 about 35 letters have been received from right hon. and hon. Members concerning various aspects of the Visiting Forces Act. Other letters and inquiries have been received directly from the general public.

Naval Contracts (Tendering)

21. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on competitive tendering for recent naval contracts.

Mr. Lee: As I told the House on 14 January at column 913, orders were placed on 3 January for three Upholder class submarines and one Trafalgar class SSN. The order for the Upholder class submarines was awarded to CL/VSEL after a competition in which this yard offered substantially the best value for the defence budget and the order for the SSN was placed with VSEL as the only United Kingdom shipbuilder currently able to build nuclear-powered submarines.

Territorial Army

23. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about pay and conditions in the Territorial Army.

Mr. Lee: My Department has received a number of representations from hon. Members, the council of TAVR associations and members of the TA on a number of aspects of TA pay and conditions of service.

Procurement

24. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest forecast of outturn for defence procurement for 1985-86.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The defence procurement vote (Class 1, Vote 2) provides for expenditure in the current year of £8,723 million. This Vote, together with the other cash-limited defence votes, constitutes the block defence cash limit which is managed as a whole. The final outturn will be contained within the block limit but it is too early to predict the precise outturn for individual votes.

26. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the employment implications of his procurement policy.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Employment levels in the United Kingdom defence industry will depend on the success of individual firms in winning orders both at home and abroad. The Ministry of Defence's procurement programme aims to give the best value for money for the taxpayer by pursuing the twin approaches of increasing competition between suppliers and fostering collaboration with our international partners. Improvements in the competitivenes of United Kingdom firms in meeting our requirements will stand them in good stead to win foreign orders. Participation in collaborative projects can enable British firms to remain at the forefront of rapidly developing technologies where it would not be cost effective or even feasible to do so independently.

Defence Establishments (Location)

25. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is yet in a position to announce plans for moving defence establishments to the north of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: So far we have only been considering this question in general terms and are not yet ready to put forward specific proposals. However, all proposals will need to stand on their economic and operational merits.

Royal Naval Vessels (Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean)

27. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to cut the number of Royal Navy ships at present posted to the Persian gulf and the Indian Ocean.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Merchant Shipping (Gulf)

28. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to initiate Royal Naval patrols to seek to prevent British merchant shipping being boarded by Iranian soldiers in international waters in the gulf.

Mr. Stanley: We maintain a Royal Navy patrol in the vicinity of the gulf. On the question of the legality of boarding vessels on the high seas, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on 28 January at column *428*.

Battlefield Nuclear Weapons

29. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement regarding the progress of the recently begun bilateral negotiations on the modernisation of battlefield nuclear weapons.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 20 January at columns *90-91*.

Airspace (United States Air Force)

30. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the amount of British airspace under the control of the United States air force.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence Procurement on 30 January at columns *627-8*. USAF aircraft are not based at any RAF air stations other than those listed in his previous question.

Fearless and Intrepid

31. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce when the decision on the replacement of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid will be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) earlier today.

Surface Fleet

32. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to reduce the size of the surface fleet over the next five years.

Mr. Stanley: The ships from the RN and RFA that on present plans will be withdrawn during 1986 were given in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) on 5 February at columns *183-4*. The corresponding list for 1987 is:

HMS Walrus—Porpoise Class Submarine
HMS Sealion—Porpoise Class Submarine
HMS Engadine—Helicopter Training Ship
RFA Sir Caradoc—Interim Landing Ship Logistic

As I said in my reply to my hon. Friend, certain of the ships expected to be withdrawn from the active fleet in 1986 will continue to be available at standby status where they will remain declared to NATO. As for the period 1988 onwards it is not our general practice to give details of our disposal plans so far ahead; nor to give the planned acceptance dates of the new ships that will be joining the fleet over the next five years.

FH70 System

33. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what powers he has under the memorandum of understanding relating to the FH70 system in relation to any of the foreign participants supplying arms or ammunition to a country which is engaged in hostilities against British troops.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the unlikely event of either of the other Governments participating in the FH70 programme wishing to supply FH70 guns or ammunition to a foreign country engaged in hostilities against British troops, the United Kingdom's prior consent would be required. The FH70 memorandum of understanding does, of course, refer to the supply only of FH70 guns and ammunition.

Trident

34. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the cost of the Trident system.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer to the answer which I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

47. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the programme to develop the warheads for Trident is on schedule; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The programme to develop the warheads for Trident is making satisfactory progress and will fully support the Trident submarine in-service date of the mid-1990s.

Post-costing Arrangements

35. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will undertake a review of post-costing arrangements within his Department.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Post-costing is undertaken in accordance with arrangements agreed between the Government and the Confederation of British Industry in 1968. The arrangements are reviewed by the independent review board for Government contracts at each of its triennial reviews, the latest of which was in 1984. In addition, the incidence of post-costing is considered each year by the Ministry when drawing up its programme of contracts to be post-costed. The Committee of Public Accounts was told in evidence on 18 November 1985 (Production Costs of Defence Equipment) that the Ministry intended to increase the volume of post-costing, and action to achieve that aim is in hand.

Dockyard Services Bill

36. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about the Dockyard Services Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: My right hon. Friend has received two letters about the Dockyard Services Bill and has had one meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) at which the Bill was discussed.

Defence Budget

37. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is planning any future economies in the defence budget.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 30 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) at column *627*. We shall, of course, continue to seek economies through improved efficiency and through increased competition in equipment procurement.

Security

38. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to his Department, over the past three years, of increased security measures, including

manpower, necessary at Ministry of Defence property as a result of the activities of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and other protestors.

Mr. Stanley: Almost all security measures are adopted for more than one specific purpose. It is not generally possible therefore to isolate the measures taken solely for these reasons. The main package of security expenditure necessitated principally by protestors in this period was the operation to clear and fence RAF Molesworth in February 1985. The total cost of this operation was in the order of £6·5 million, although approximately half this sum was devoted to the erection of a perimeter fence which would have been required regardless of the threat from demonstrators.

Strategic Defence Initiative

39. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied with progress of implementation of the terms of the memorandum of understanding between the United States of America and the United Kingdom on the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes.

51. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on plans for Her Majesty's Government participation in the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Since my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) announced to this House on 9 December the nature of the formal governmental agreement reached with the United States on United Kingodm participation in the strategic defence initiative research programme, further progress has been made in a number of areas. the SDI participation office within the Ministry of Defence is now operational. Negotiations on administrative arrangements to enable the memorandum of understanding to be implemented are well advanced. Our officials and companies are engaged in discussions with the United States SDI Organisation to further clarify potential areas for United States funded work to be placed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will review the implications of the strategic defence initiative for the defence of western Europe.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) on 22 October 1985 at columns 136-7.

Supplies

40. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the delivery times and quality of material supplied to Her Majesty's forces.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Department strives constantly to improve the value for money obtained in procuring material to meet the needs of the Armed Forces. This means that we seek to obtain a better overall package including such factors as delivery times and quality as well as performance and cost.

Defence Contractors

41. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what amount he has received from defence contractors in excess profits in the last three years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The amount which has been recovered to date on contracts which were post-costed during the three years 1982-84 is £20·6 million.

Nimrod Aircraft

42. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is considering the cancellation of the Nimrod AEW Mk III.

46. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the progress of the Nimrod contract.

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with the Nimrod AEW Mk II.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross).

Youth Training Scheme

43. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operation of the YTS within the armed services.

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with YTS trainees in the armed forces.

Mr. John Lee: My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Support has today announced in another place that the armed services YTS is to be expanded from one to two years in line with changes to the civilian YTS.

Since the armed services YTS started in 1983 over 9,000 applications have been received with nearly 2,700 accepted. Total intake stands at over 2,200 with some 750 currently undergoing training. About 860 participants have so far transferred to regular engagements.

Nuclear Weapons

44. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give his latest estimate of the numbers of intermediate range nuclear weapons deployed in East and West Europe.

Mr. Stanley: Information on the numbers of intermediate range nuclear weapons deployed in East and West Europe is contained in Figures 12 and 13 of Annex A of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1985". We plan to update this information in the next "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Defence Equipment (Exports)

45. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the export potential of defence equipment ordered by his Department.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Ministry of Defence's current procurement procedures already reflect its concern to maximise the export potential of the equipment

procured to meet the needs of the United Kingdom armed forces. However, there is always scope for improvement and discussions are currently taking place within the Department to consider how this might best be achieved.

Gibraltar

49. **Mr. Stanbrook** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what measures apply to British and other military aircraft seeking to use Gibraltar airfield arising out of the restrictions imposed by the Spanish authorities on such use.

Mr. Stanley: Spanish prohibited airspace in the Algeciras region imposes limitations on the approach to landing and take-off manoeuvres of all military aircraft using Gibraltar. Other than this, no special measures apply to military aircraft seeking to use the airfield.

Crown Proceedings Act 1947

50. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans for amending section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing at present to add to the reply I gave to the right hon. Gentleman on 26 July 1985 at columns *876-77*.

Westland plc

52. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the comparative implications for defence policy of the latest proposals for the financial reconstruction of Westland plc.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have nothing to add to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 January 1986 at column 1097. As she said then, the Government's concern is to see a financial reconstruction of Westland as soon as possible which maintains a British helicopter design, development and manufacturing capability, supports United Kingdom participation in collaboration with NATO Allies and safeguards the interests of the company, its employees, and its shareholders.

The Prime Minister also said that she believed both sets of proposals put to the company could achieve these objectives and hoped that the shareholders would be able to take their final decision very shortly.

Helicopter Policy

53. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the next meeting of the national armaments directors will take place to discuss European helicopter policy.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No meeting of national armament directors is currently planned specifically to discuss European helicopter policy.

Air Space (Radar Protection)

54. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning radar protection of United Kingdom air space.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Major enhancements of the United Kingdom's radar capabilities are included in the substantial modernisation programme of the United Kingdom's air defences which is currently being implemented.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the defence contracts placed in 1984-85 were placed by competition; and what steps he is taking to increase that proportion.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In 1984-85 the proportion of work placed in a competitive environment was 46 per cent., an increase of eight percentage points on the proportion for the previous year. A further significant increase is expected in 1985-86, and indeed for the first nine months of 1985-86 the figure was well over 60 per cent., as I informed the House on 30 January at column 1184. Regarding the steps we are taking to increase that proportion, I refer the hon. Member for the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) gave on 30 January at column 628.

Offensive Weapons Systems (Lasers)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has taken any steps to procure evidence of the feasibility of using laser technology as offensive weapon systems.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is our practice to keep abreast of all technologies with a potential defence application.

Shipbuilding (Contracts)

Mr. Sayeed asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy, in reaching a decision on any competition between Swan Hunter Shipbuilders and Harland and Wolff for a contract for an AOR vessel, to disregard the element in Harland and Wolff's costings which he assesses is attributable to subsidies either from Government or European sources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The Ministry of Defence's policy is to place warship contracts, wherever practicable, by competitive tendering, and to obtain best value for money for the defence budget. Where a tenderer is publicly owned, the question whether subsidies are applied to tenders is a matter for the sponsor Department; the Northern Ireland Office in the case of Harland and Wolff.

Royal Yacht Britannia

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence if Portsmouth fleet maintenance repair base is capable of carrying out the refit work on the royal yacht Britannia.

Mr. Lee: Since HMY Britannia was last refitted at Portsmouth, the base has been restructured as a fleet maintenance and repair organisation, with a smaller work force and a change in the balance of skills. The content and spread of the work planned for the 1987 refit of the royal yacht is such that it is unlikely to be compatible with the capacity, particularly in the finishing trades, available in the Portsmouth fleet maintenance and repair organisation.

Cash Limits

Mr. John Townend asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes to make any changes to current defence cash limits for 1985-86.

Mr. Younger: Yes. The following changes are being made, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring Supplementary Estimate. The net effect of the changes is a small reduction in public expenditure.

£'000s

Class I	*Current Cash Limits*	*Increase/Decrease*	*Revised cash limit*
I. 1	6,644,742	+75,100: transferred from 1, 2, 4, and 5	6,719,842
I. 2	8,732,002	− 2,054: reduced provision	
		−17,610: transferred to I. 1	8,703,338
I. 4	1,284,456	−30,000: transferred to I. 4	1,254,456
I. 5	442,800	−27,490: transferred to I. 1	415,310

The reduced provision mainly reflects surrender of VAT refunds on vehicle maintenance contracted out. The other changes are to allow for transfers within the Ministry of Defence expenditure block following the 1985 service pay settlement.

Security (Disciplinary Action)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many officers and men in the Royal Air Force have left in each of the last three years, due to the fact that their services are no longer required;

(2) how many officers and men have left the Royal Navy, in each of the last three years, due to the fact that their services were no longer required;

(3) how many officers and men have left the Army in each of the last three years due to the fact that their services were no longer required.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 February 1986, c. *306*]: The number of commissioned officers and men who left the regular forces due to the fact that their services were no longer required were:

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1 April-31 December 1985*
Commissioned Officers			
Royal Navy	37	33	9
Royal Marines	3	4	1
Army	61	98	75
Royal Air Force	95	99	43
Total	196	234	128
Servicemen			
Royal Navy	576	568	422
Royal Marines	125	171	134
Army	3,613	2,979	2,043
Royal Air Force	615	617	412
Total	4,929	4,335	3,011

Figures for commissioned male officers show the numbers whose appointment was terminated. Officers designate have been excluded.

Figures for service men include disciplinary cases, unsuitable recruits, training failures and inefficiency discharges.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many officers and men in the Royal Air Force have been disciplined for major breaches of security in each of the last three years;

(2) how many officers and men in the Royal Navy have been disciplined for major breaches of security in each of the last three years;

(3) how many officers and men in the Army have been disciplined for major breaches of security in each of the last three years.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 February 1986, c. *306*]: A total of one officer and two soldiers in the Army have been disciplined for major breaches of security under the Official Secrets Act in the last three years. No officer or other rank in either the RAF or the RN has been disciplined under these circumstances during this period.

Collaborative Programmes

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the European countries involved in collaborative programmes with the United Kingdom in the procurement of defence systems, together with the dates of the memoranda of understanding, the proportion of work in percentage and pounds sterling terms which accrues to each country in respect of the procurement order for each system for each country; the companies involved; and what information he has as to whether any such company or its employees have been the subject of any prosecution in their own, or any other country concerning the supply of arms or ammunition to another country within the last seven years, and the countries which it is alleged were so supplied.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: Details of collaborative defence equipment programmes in which the United Kingdom participates with other European countries are set out. The workshare is expressed as the broad percentage of work in each project which each nation should achieve under the terms of the relevant memorandum of understanding. It is not our practice to publish costing details for individual equipment projects. The companies listed are those principally involved in each project in each of the participating nations; in addition, large numbers of companies are involved in subcontract and other work.

It is not practicable to provide the comprehensive information sought on prosecutions concerning the supply of arms and ammunition. Memoranda of understanding for collaborative defence equipment projects include appropriate arrangements governing the supply of that equipment to third parties in which we naturally seek to

safeguard United Kingdom interests. But each participating Government must be responsible for exercising their national export control regulations.

European collaborative projects involving the United Kingdom

Project	*Other Nations*	*Date of first MOU*	*Work share*	*Companies Involved (and Status of project)*
Tornado	Federal Republic of Germany, Italy	July 1968	UK 48 per cent. GE 40 per cent. IT 12 per cent.	Airframe: PANAVIA (Joint Company)—BAe, (UK) MBB (GE) Aeritalia (IT) Engine:—TURBO UNION (Joint Company) Motoren Und (GE) Rolls royce (UK), Fiat (IT) (Production)
Jaguar	France	May 1965	Equal Share	Airframe: SEPECAT (Joint Company)— BAe (UK). AMD-BA (FR) Engine: Rolls Royce (UK) Turbomeca (FR) (Production)
Lynx	France	February 1967	UK 84 per cent. FR 16 per cent.	Westland (UK), Aerospatiale (FR) (Production)
Puma	France	February 1967	UK 20 per cent. FR 80 per cent. (approx)	Westland (UK), Aerospatiale (FR) (Production)
Gazelle	France	February 1967	UK 60 per cent. FR 40 per cent.	Westland (UK), Aerospatiale (FR) (Production)
EH 101	Italy	November 1979	UK 50 per cent. IT 50 per cent.	Westland (UK) Augusta (IT) (Development)
RTM 322	France	June 1985	Approx Equal Shares	Rolls Royce (UK), Turbomeca (FR) (Development)
Martel	France	September 1969	UK 53 per cent. FR 47 per cent.	BAe (UK) SNIAS (FR) (Production)
Milan	France, Federal Republic of Germany	October 1976	UK 33·3 per cent. FR 33·3 per cent. GE 33·3 per cent.	Euromissile (Joint Company) consisting of MBB(GE) and Aerospatiale (FR). Licensed manufacture by BAe from Euromissile but any further development costs shared ⅓ each.
SRARM	Belgium, Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Netherlands, United States	February 1985	Equal Shares	2 Consortia: 1. BAe (UK), AEG (GE), BDM (US), Snia BPB Spe (IT), Garratt (CA) Philips (BE) Hollandse Signaal Apparaten bv (NL) 2. Ford Aerospace (US)—Electtronica (IT), Fokker (NL), Marconi (UK), MBB (GE), SABCA (BE), British Aerospace (CA) (Feasibility Study)
LRSOM	United States, Federal Republic of Germany	July 1984	Equal Shares	2 Consortia: 1. Boeing (US), BAe (UK), MBB (GE) 2. General Dynamic (US), Hunting (UK), Dornier (GE) (Feasibility Study)
TRIGAT	France, Federal Republic of Germany	October 1976	Equal Shares	Euromissile—BAe, MBB Aerospatiale (Definition Phase)
ASRAAM	Federal Republic of Germany, Norway	January 1980	UK 45 per cent. GE 45 per cent. NO 10 per cent.	Joint Co EMbH(BBG) Comprising BAe (UK), BGT (GE), Raufoss (NO) (Definition Phase)
FH 70	Federal Republic of Germany, Italy	July 1968 (GE/UK) October 1970 (GE, IT, UK)	UK 36·25 per cent. GE 36·25 per cent. IT 27·5 per cent.	VSEL (UK), RO plc (UK), Rheinmetall (GE), WNC Nitrochemie (GE), Oto Melara (IT), SNIA-BPD & Simmel (IT) (Production)
SP 70	Federal Republic of Germany, Italy	July 1973	UK 38 per cent. GE 50 per cent. IT 12 per cent.	RO plc (UK), Rheinmetall (GE), Oto Melara (IT) (Development)
European Fighter Aircraft (EFA)	Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Spain	NADs statement Turin—August 1. MOU still under negotiation	UK 33 per cent. GE 33 per cent. IT 21 per cent. SP 13 per cent.	Airframe consortium—BAe (UK), MBB/Dornier (GE), Aeritalia (IT), CASA (SP) Engine consortium—Rolls Royce (UK), Motoren Und Turbinen Union (GE), Fiat (IT), Sener (SP) (Project Definition)
MLRS III	France Federal Republic of Germany United States	January 1984	FR 22 per cent. GE 22 per cent. UK 22 per cent. US 34 per cent.	Martin Marietta (US), Brandt Armaments (FR), Thorn EMI (UK), Diehl Gmbh (GE) (Development)

Project	Other Nations	Date of first MOU	Work share	Companies Involved (and Status of project)
NFR 90	Canada France Federal Republic of Germany Italy Netherlands Spain United States	April 1984	Equal Share	British Shipbuilders (UK), Thompson Sintra (FR), Acres International (CA), MTG Marinetechnik (GE), Cantieri Navali Italiani (IT), Hollandse Signaal Apparaten (NL), EN Bazan (SP), Westinghouse (US) (Feasibility Study)
Sea Gnat	United States Denmark Federal Republic of Germany Norway	January 1977	GE & NO withdrawal from the Project Development undertaken by US	—Hycor (US) (Development/Production)
MLRS I (European production)	United States France Federal Republic of Germany Italy	June 1979	FR 18 per cent. GE 51 per cent. IT 4 per cent. UK 27 per cent.	Production Contract not let. Competitive Tender. Contractor's names Commercial in Confidence (Production)
Sidewinder AIM 9L	Federal Republic of Germany Norway Italy	January 1979	GE 53 per cent. UK 29 per cent. NO 9 per cent. IT 9 per cent.	Bodenseewerk BGT (GE), BAe (UK), Snia BPD (IT), Raufoss (NO) (Production)
NH 90 Helicopter	Netherlands Federal Republic of Germany France Italy	September 1985	Equal Shares	Westland (UK), Fokker (NL), Agusta (IT), Aerospatiale (FR), MBB (GE) (Feasibility Study)

BE = Belgium
CA = Canada
DE = Denmark
FR = France
GE = Federal Republic of Germany
IT = Italy
NL = Netherlands
NO = Norway
SP = Spain
US = United States

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 February 1986

WALES

Hospital Schemes

Mr. Pendry asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all new hospital schemes, including the anticipated number of beds, approved since May 1979, and indicate the likely opening date.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: New hospital schemes in Wales approved by the Welsh Office since May 1979 are given in the following table:

Scheme	*Number of beds*	*Opening Date*
St. Davids, Carmathen, Scheme I	90	July 1983
East Glamorgan EMI Unit	30	February 1984
Bryntirion Scheme II—EMI Ward	30	April 1984
Geriatric Ward	30	February 1985
		Likely Opening Date
Ystradgynlais Community Hospital	52	March 1986
Morriston Scheme II	72	Mid 1986
St. Tydfil's Day Unit and Adaptations	154	Mid 1986
Llandudno Scheme I	66	Mid 1987
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd Scheme II	146	Mid 1988
Llandough Obstetric Unit	108	Early 1989
Prince Charles Scheme II	77	Early 1991
Singleton Scheme III—Obstetric/ Paediatric Unit	188	Mid 1991
Geriatric	90	Mid 1993
General Acute Unit	30	Mid 1993
Wrexham Scheme II—Phase 1	140	Mid 1991
Phase 2	60	Mid 1994

NHS (Staff)

Mr. Pendry asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* ancillary staff, *(b)* maintenance staff, *(c)* ambulance staff and *(d)* nurses and midwives were working in the National Health Service for each year since 1975 expressed in absolute numbers and as a percentage of total National Health Service staff.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Whole-time equivalents for each of the required staff groups are given in the following table, expressed as numbers and as percentages of the total:

NHS Staffing in Wales

**Year*	*Ancillary staff*		*†Works and maintenance staff*		*Ambulance staff*		*Nurses and midwives*	
	Whole-time equivalent	*Percentage of total*	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Percentage of total*	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Percentage of total*	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Percentage of total*
1975	11,476	24·7	1,813	3·9	1,204	2·6	21,255	45·8
1976	11,552	24·3	1,850	3·9	1,279	2·7	21,804	46·0
1977	11,407	23·9	1,912	4·0	1,286	2·7	21,860	45·9
1978	11,753	23·9	2,019	4·1	1,330	2·7	22,386	45·6
1979	11,879	23·6	2,051	4·1	1,336	2·7	23,031	45·8
1980	11,989	23·0	2,073	4·0	1,347	2·6	‡24,366	46·8
1981	11,839	22·2	2,128	4·0	1,396	2·6	25,362	47·6
1982	11,784	21·8	2,145	4·0	1,416	2·6	25,909	47·9
1983	11,559	21·4	2,117	3·9	1,428	2·6	25,981	48·0
1984	10,964	20·1	2,144	3·9	1,460	2·7	26,448	48·5

* Figures relate to 30 September.

† Maintenance staff cannot be identified separately before 1979. The figures for maintenance staff from 1979 are as follows:

	Whole-time equivalent	*Percentage*
1979	1,645	3·3
1980	1,648	3·2
1981	1,683	3·2
1982	1,700	3·1
1983	1,674	3·1
1984	1,698	3·1

‡ Basic weekly contract hours for nurses and midwives were reduced from 40 to 37·5 hours during 1980 and therefore whole-time equivalents before and after this date are not strictly comparable.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he will publish the consultation paper on the local authority capital expenditure control system in Wales which was promised in chapter 6 of the Green Paper, "Paying for Local Government." Cmnd. 9714.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The consultation paper "Review of the Local Authority Capital Expenditure Control System in England and Wales" is being sent to local authorities and other interested organisations today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Graduates (Post-experience Courses)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to grant financial assistance for post-experience courses for university graduates or students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: I shall write to the hon. Member.

University Lecturers

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how many university lecturers have been either pensioned off or have accepted voluntary redundancy payments during the last six academic years and as to what costs have been incurred by universities as a result.

Mr. Walden: The numbers and cost of academic and academic related staff taking retirement under the UGC's redundancy compensation scheme since it was introduced in 1981-82 have been.

Year	*Number retiring*	*Cost £ million*
1981-82	1,600	35
1982-83	1,100	31
1983-84	1,000	30
1984-85	700	23

Mathematics and Physics Graduates

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many university students graduated in mathematics and physics at universities or polytechnics in the academic years between 1974-75 and 1978-79 and between 1979-80 and 1984-85; and how many teachers have been employed to teach those subjects in secondary schools in the academic years between 1979-80 and 1985-86.

Mr. Walden: The number of first-degree graduates in mathematics and physics from universities in Great Britain and polytechnics in England and Wales between 1974-75 and 1978-79 is estimated to have been 27,000. The number graduating between 1979-80 and 1984-85 was 35,000. The number of graduates in 1985-86 is not yet available.

Information is not collected annually on the deployment of teachers within schools. A staffing survey was carried out by the Department in 1984 among a sample of maintained secondary schools in England estimated that some 41,000 full-time teachers were teaching mathematics and some 13,000 were teaching physics. There were also some 10,000 who were teaching remedial mathematics. Some of the teachers in each of these subjects were teaching other subjects as well. Physics is also taught as a component within the subject "General Science", which some 28,000 teachers were teaching in 1984.

Overseas Students

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the range of tuition fees which students from overseas have been required to pay for *(a)* undergraduate courses and *(b)* post graduate courses at universities since 1979-80.

Mr. Walden: For the academic year 1979-80 the Secretary of State for Education and Science recommended that overseas students should pay fees of £940 for undergraduate courses and of £1,230 for postgraduate courses. For subsequent years minimum fee levels have been recommended by the University Grants Committee as follows:

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Arts	2,000	2,500	2,700	2,900	3,150	3,310	3,480
Science	3,000	3,600	3,600	3,800	4,150	4,350	4,570
Clinical years of medicine, dentistry and veterinary science	5,000	6,000	6,600	7,000	7,650	8,050	8,450

The recommended minima apply to undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Research Projects

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many academic research projects have been financially supported by research councils and the University Grants Committee during the last seven years.

Mr. Walden: The University Grants Committee provides through recurrent, equipment and capital grants general financial support for reseach in universities. This support is not related to specific projects, but is intended to provide facilities and research activities, which can be further selectively funded by specific grants by the research councils.

The number of research grants awarded by each of the research councils to academic institutions over the past seven years is as follows:

	Number
AFRC	839
ESRC	1,790
MRC	3,272
NERC	1,119
SERC	14,892

Maintenance Grants

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the different maintenance awards which have been granted for each academic year since 1979-80; and to what extent the value of student maintenance grants has declined or increased during the same period.

Mr. Walden: The information is as follows:

Maintenance Awards Rates

Academic Year	*Students living at home*	*Student living elsewhere than in London*	*Students living in London*
	£	£	£
1979-80	985	1,245	1,485
1980-81	1,125	1,430	1,695
1981-82	1,180	1,535	1,825
1982-83	1,225	1,595	1,900
1983-84	1,275	1,660	1,975
1984-85*	1,435	1,775	2,100
1985-86	1,480	1,830	2,165

* From 1984-85 maintenance grant was increased to include a flat rate element for travel.

In real terms, and after adjusting for the changed arrangements in respect of travel costs from 1984-85, the value of the "elsewhere" and "London" rates declined by 12 per cent. and that of the "home" rate by 15 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1985-86.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Cash Limits

Dr. Hampson asked the Attorney-General what change he proposes to make to the 1985-86 cash limit for class IX, vote II, Administration of Justice, Northern Ireland.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote II will be increased by £355,000 from £7,403,000 to £7,758,000. The increase is required for repair costs to certain courthouses in Northern Ireland and for the procurement of alternative accommodation for the legal aid department in Belfast, both of which have been necessary following extensive damage caused by terrorist activity. The increase will be a charge to the Capital Reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planning total of public expenditure.

Social Security Appeals

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Attorney-General, for the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* how many social security appeals in total were made to the commissioners, *(b)* how many of these appeals were made other than on a point of law, *(c)* how many appeals were made by women and *(d)* how many of these appeals were made other than on a point of law.

The Attorney-General: In 1985, 2,151 appeals were made to the social security commissioners in England and Wales. I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that the corresponding figure for Scotland was 426 appeals. I regret the other information is not available.

ENERGY

Small-scale Electricity Generators

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will support research into the economic feasibility of the construction of modular units for small-scale electricity generators suitable for rural areas and for export.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department will consider any proposal submitted for small-scale devices. Support is currently being given towards small-scale hydro-power devices for electricity generation.

Coal Industry

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many jobs have been lost in the mining industry since March 1985.

Mr. David Hunt: Between the end of March 1985 and 25 January 1986 there was a reduction of some 31,000 in the number of men on NCB colliery books.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many collieries have been closed since March 1985; and what is the approximate number of tonnes of capacity which have been lost as a result of these closures.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that 24 pits have closed since the end of March 1985. Questions of mining capacity are matters for the National Coal Board.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people admitted to the United Kingdom as *(a)* visitors and *(b)* on temporary admission subsequently married and sought permission to settle; and how many such applications were permitted in each of the last three years.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that information on these lines is not at present available, but arrangements have already been made which should in due course enable it to be provided in the future.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he is undertaking, and with whom, in preparation for the appointment to the chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission which falls vacant in May.

Mr. Waddington: None. My right hon. Friend intends to invite the present chairman to serve for a further term.

Tactical Options Manual

Mr. Crowther asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken before approving amendments to the tactical options manual to ensure that operations carried out in accordance with the current manual would not give rise to any conflict with section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The tactical options manual was prepared by the Association of Chief Police Officers and it is for it to make any amendments. The amount of force which may lawfully be used in any police operation is subject always to the overriding principle set out in section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 that the police shall use no more force than is reasonable in the circumstances. What is reasonable force for the purposes of that section depends on the particular circumstances in each case.

Rape

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the average sentence imposed by criminal courts for rape during each of the last five years; and if he will indicate the trend over the same period of the shortest and longest custodial sentences imposed for the offence.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables" (for 1984, under classification 19 in vol. 2, tables S2.1(A), S2.3, S2.4 and S2.5). These figures include offences of aiding and abetting rape and attempted rape. Corresponding information for 1985 is not yet available.

Community Radio

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply to the right hon. Member for Brent, East on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *582*, if he will name the persons and groups from ethnic minorities whom the advisory committee on community radio has met and which the committee has listed.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that discussions between members of the advisory panel on community radio, individually and collectively, and interested individuals and groups from the ethnic minority communities took place on an informal, and in some cases a confidential, basis. In these circumstances, I do not think it would be right to identify particular individuals or groups.

Cash Limits

Mr. Lightbown asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make any changes to the cash limits within his responsibility.

Mr. Hurd: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit on the Prisons Vote (class IX, vote 8) will be raised by £22,814,000 from £591,444,000 to £614,258,000. This additional provision will be used to cover the cost of acquiring, converting and bringing into use RAF Lindholme as a prison, and of other measures taken to cater for the exceptional surge in the prison population during the first half of the year. In addition, the provision will be used to make good a shortfall in the level of receipts expected to be realised from the sale of staff quarters.

The additional provision is partly offset by savings on the Central Administrative, Miscellaneous and Community Service and Civil Defence Vote (class IX, vote 7), the cash limit for which will be reduced by £9,000,000 from £306,352,000 to £297,352,000. The net increase of £13,814,000 will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the public expenditure planning total.

ENVIRONMENT

Refuse Disposal

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to enable district councils to add to the national non-domestic rate poundage proposed in "Paying for Local Government", Cmnd. 9714, an element which will reimburse the local authority for giving a commercial refuse disposal service.

Mr. Waldegrave: Local authorities currently have a duty to make reasonable charges for trade refuse disposal. This would not be affected by introduction of a national non-domestic rate.

Local Authority Employees (Rent)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which deduct tenants' rents from salary, when the tenant is an employee of the authority.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available centrally.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards the future role of

metropolitan district councils in relation to the work currently done by the metropolitan counties in promoting local industrial or economic development initiatives.

Sir George Young: It is for the metropolitan district councils to decide whether they wish to continue promoting local industrial economic initiatives currently carried out by the metropolitan counties, following implementation of the Local Government Act 1985.

They already have the necessary powers.

Handicapped People

Mr. Hannam asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress towards further provision for handicapped people in building and access regulations.

Sir George Young: The next step is to recast the access regulations in schedule 2 to the Building Regulations 1985 into the functional form of the rest of the regulations. A draft requirement and a supporting approved document giving practical guidance are being prepared for public consultation.

When the British Standards Institution has finalised its comprehensive code of practice on means of escape for disabled people, we will be consulting publicity on extending the scope of the access requirements to a wider range of buildings.

District Auditors

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total of legal costs incurred by district auditors over the last 10 years and the total costs of district auditors other than legal costs in identifying and certifying and dealing with losses.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Secretary of State for the Environment is no longer responsible for local authority audit. Responsibility for this was transferred to the Audit Commission in 1983. The information requested, so far as it relates to the period prior to 1 April 1983, is not available except at disproportionate expense. As to the period after the date of handover, I can only suggest that the hon. Member contacts the Audit Commission. The commission's address is: 1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PW.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, since 1972, how many certificates of surcharge have been issued against local councillors by the District Audit Service; what is the total of the losses certified by district auditors over that period; how much of such losses has been recovered from surcharged councillors; and to what account surcharged receipts have been paid.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Secretary of State for the Environment is no longer responsible for local authority audit. Responsibility for this was transferred to the Audit Commission in 1983. Between 1 January 1972 and 31 March 1983, 37 certificates of loss were issued against council members by the district audit service. The total value of the certificates was £123,317. As to the number issued after 1 April 1983, the hon. Member may care to contact the Audit Commission. The commission's address is: 1 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PW.

Any losses recovered are payable to the local authority concerned. The other information requested is therefore not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Voluntary Bodies

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now announce the final allocations of grant to assist voluntary bodies affected by the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the Greater London council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I am pleased to be able to announce our allocations of transitional grant to London boroughs and metropolitan districts. These allocations are only one aspect of the support to voluntary bodies after abolition. Transitional grant is the extra support to £20 million worth of voluntary projects which the Government are giving over and above the RSG support to abolition areas. The allocations will be followed as soon as possible by letters to individual authorities indicating which projects have been accepted as eligible for transitional grant. This will enable authorities to go ahead and confirm their very substantial spending plans — amounting to some £40 million for grants to voluntary bodies affected by abolition.

In making allocations we have taken account wherever possible of spending to replace grants paid direct to voluntary bodies by abolition authorities, even though some of these additional spending burdens are not directly supported by transitional grant.

This spending is in addition to the plans for funding county-wide groups which are now under way in most areas. In London, a budget of £27 million has already been drawn up by the boroughs for collective funding of voluntary groups. This is a very encouraging demonstration of the willingness of authorities to work together in support of the voluntary sector.

I am placing a list of allocations in the Library.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from voluntary organisations located in Merseyside concerning their future funding; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1986]: I have received a number of representations from Merseyside voluntary organisations, particularly expressing the view that transitional grant should be made available to help local authorities on Merseyside support voluntary bodies operating countrywide. My Noble Friend the Minister of State met a representative group in Liverpool on Friday.

I refer also to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 7 February 1986, at columns *282-83*.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans for increasing the rate support grant for local authority police spending in the coming financial year.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have decided, following my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's decision to increase the rate of police grant for 1986-87 to 51 per cent., to increase the total of block grant available by £22

million. This would increase aggregate Exchequer grant in England by about £50 million. All police authorities in both shire and metropolitan areas, will gain grant, and the table shows how much. This recognises the priority which the Government give to improving the policing of our country. No other authorities will lose grant. All ratepayers will therefore benefit from the increased grant.

	Estimated increase in police grant £	*Estimated increase in block grant* £	*Estimated increase in police and block grant* £
Greater Manchester Police Authority	1,650,000	1,440,000	3,090,000
Merseyside Police Authority	1,180,000	1,040,000	2,220,000
South Yorkshire Police Authority	720,000	410,000	1,130,000
Northumbria Police Authority	880,000	200,000	1,080,000
West Midlands Police Authority	1,640,000	1,110,000	2,750,000
West Yorkshire Police Authority	1,250,000	720,000	1,970,000
Metropolitan Police	8,050,000	8,870,000	16,920,000
Avon	450,000	270,000	720,000
Bedfordshire	270,000	210,000	480,000
Berkshire	330,000	350,000	680,000
Buckinghamshire	290,000	290,000	580,000
Cambridgeshire	280,000	200,000	480,000
Cheshire	480,000	320,000	800,000
Cleveland	340,000	260,000	600,000
Cornwall	200,000	70,000	270,000
Cumbria	240,000	60,000	300,000
Derbyshire	450,000	230,000	680,000
Devon	450,000	180,000	630,000
Dorset	260,000	170,000	430,000
Durham	300,000	30,000	330,000
East Sussex	290,000	220,000	510,000
Essex	690,000	550,000	1,240,000
Gloucestershire	230,000	120,000	350,000
Hampshire	690,000	440,000	1,130,000
Hereford and Worcester	300,000	190,000	490,000
Hertfordshire	470,000	430,000	900,000
Humberside	460,000	140,000	600,000
Isle of Wight	60,000	20,000	80,000
Kent	680,000	350,000	1,030,000
Lancashire	720,000	170,000	890,000
Leicestershire	430,000	240,000	670,000
Lincolnshire	270,000	90,000	360,000
Norfolk	310,000	190,000	500,000
Northamptonshire	270,000	170,000	440,000
North Yorkshire	330,000	100,000	430,000
Nottinghamshire	510,000	270,000	780,000
Oxfordshire	240,000	170,000	410,000
Shropshire	190,000	80,000	270,000
Somerset	200,000	80,000	280,000
Staffordshire	510,000	220,000	730,000
Suffolk	270,000	140,000	410,000
Surrey	440,000	380,000	820,000
Warwickshire	230,000	150,000	380,000
West Sussex	280,000	220,000	500,000
Wiltshire	250,000	100,000	350,000

These calculations assume that rate-limited authorities would have spent at rate limit and other authorities would have spent at the settlement assumption, and that the increase in police grant leads to no increase in expenditure. They assume that before the increase in the police grant police expenditure net of police grant accounted for 6·7 per cent. of shire counties' settlement spending assumption.

Local Authorities (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Franks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the consultation paper on the local authority capital expenditure control system which was promised in chapter 6 of the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government", Cmnd. 9714.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The consultation paper "Review of the Local Authority Capital Expenditure Control System in England and Wales" is being sent to local authorities and other interested organisations today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRANSPORT

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the expenditure on transport professional and technical services by local authorities for 1985-86 based upon estimated outturn and for 1986-87 as planned.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Outturn figures for 1985-86 will not be available until the end of 1986. Local authorities do not provide separate budget figures for expenditure on professional and technical services. It is combined with net receipts from parking. The total of local authority 1985-86 budgets for the two items combined is £194 million. Recent trends suggest that in 1985-86 net receipts from parking will total about £45 million. So if local authorities' outturn is in line with their budgets, the figure for professional and technical services will be £239 million. The provision for professional and technical services in the Government's public expenditure plans for 1986-87 is £189 million.

Cash Limits

Mr. Page asked the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits on class VI, votes 1 and 4.

Mr. Ridley: The cash limit for class VI, vote 1 is to be reduced by £4 million from £825,009,000 to £821,009,000 and the cash limit for class VI, vote 4 is to be reduced by £4 million from £108,945,000 to £104,945,000. These reductions will partly offset additional costs on class VI, vote 3, which are subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate. The balance of the public expenditure costs of the increase will be charged to the Reserve and will not add to the planning total of public expenditure.

The reduction on class VI, vote 1 is in respect of delayed payment of reimbursements to county councils of redundancy costs of ex-local authority staff of road construction sub-units and will not affect this year's road construction programme. The reduction on class VI, vote 4 is in respect of lower than expected costs of agency services and savings on salaries and other running costs.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Voluntary Bodies

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in the *Official Report* those voluntary bodies and organisations assisted by his Department with grant aid in the last financial year for which figures are available, and the size of the grant so given.

Dr. Boyson: The information for the financial year ended 31 March 1985 is:

	£
Northern Ireland Office	
Belfast Law Centre	70,200
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	210,094
Extern	303,122
Northern Ireland Intermediate Treatment Association	1,365
Save the Children Fund	152,697
Presbyterian Church (Thompson House)	49,778
Ulster Quaker Service	9,304
Dismas House	18,701
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society	12,001
Citizens Advice Bureau	825
Belfast Rape Crisis Centre	250
Department of Finance and Personnel	
Refreshment Clubs	380,659
Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association	27,500
Northern Ireland Civil Service Retirement Fellowship	4,100
Army Benevolent Fund	15,000
Police Benevolent Fund	49,000
Ulster Defence Regiment Benevolent Fund	20,000
Public Service Training Council	178,673
Northern Ireland Economic Development Office	240,000
Incorporated Council of Law Reporting	3,000
Civil Service Benevolent Fund	13,000

	£
Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland	
Northern Ireland Council of Social Services	276,000
Community Service Volunteers	5,381
St. Vincent de Paul Society	52,026
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society	3,500
Cara-Friend	5,147
Retirement Association of Northern Ireland	7,235
International Voluntary Service	14,438
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	27,268
Northern Ireland Council for Orthopaedic Development	16,800
National Deaf Children's Society	2,420
Ulster Institute for the Deaf	6,300
Age Concern	71,873
Abbeyfield Society	2,400
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults	7,560
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	81,432
Northern Ireland Marriage Guidance Council	31,981
Northern Ireland Council on Alcohol	55,599
British Epilepsy Association (Northern Ireland Region)	6,000
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation	30,300
Northern Ireland Widows Association	5,230
Gingerbread	45,660
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	70,900
Church of Ireland Social and Family Welfare Society	1,120
Blind Centre for Northern Ireland	18,000
Motability	11,111
Multiple Sclerosis Action Group	13,340
Soldiers, Sailors and Airmens Families Association	700
Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied	13,000
Family Planning Association (NI Region)	3,500
Council on Alcohol Related Problems	23,924
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme	14,700
Multiple Sclerosis Society (NI Branch)	3,150
Ambulance Services	3,150
Women's Health Fair	2,250
National Health Service Retirement Fellowship	557
PRAXIS	22,298
Home Insulation Schemes	56,437
Disabled Drivers' Association	1,050
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	16,065
National Council for Carers and the Elderly Dependants	500
National Rubella Campaign	700
Northern Ireland Hospice	50,000
Northlands Centre	17,000
Marie Curie Memorial Foundation	5,000
Industrial Therapy Organisation	25,000
Order of Malta Ambulance Corps	15,500
British Red Cross Society	1,289
Women's Information Group	2,000
CRUSE in Northern Ireland	11,250
Open Door Housing Resettlement Project	7,000
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	1,820
Northern Ireland Council for the Single Homeless	1,500
Workers Education Association	2,400
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust	10,000
Northern Ireland Childminders Development Committee	4,193
Parents Advice Centre	2,913
Extern—West Belfast Auto Project	26,770
Northern Ireland Foster Care Association	4,163
Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroup Association	66,954
Northern Ireland Intermediate Treatment Association	1,364
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders	3,443
Down and Connor Catholic Family Welfare Society	53,225
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	37,444
Dr. Barnardo's	53,926
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society—Home Start Scheme	5,016
Community Service Volunteers—Give and Take Scheme	20,455
National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (Northern Ireland Group	1,833
National Playbus Association	671
Glendhu Children's Hostel, Belfast	3,827
Johnston Memorial Children's Home, Belfast	10,000
Manor House Children's Home, Lisburn	15,223
Marianville Mother and Baby Unit, Belfast	14
Nazareth House, Londonderry	2,619
Orans Children's Home, Newry	415
Glebe House Holiday Home, Kilclief	1,187

	£
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	
Arts Council for Northern Ireland	2,849,000
Linenhall Library	52,000
Northern Ireland Library and Information Services Council	628
Forum for Community Work Education	35,000
Protestant and Catholic Encounter	9,300
Corrymeela	69,989
Harmony Community Trust	18,000
Irish Council of Churches/Irish Commission for Justice and Peace—Peace Education Programme	14,248
Children's Community Relations Holiday Scheme	106,398
Churches' Central Committee for Community Work	17,982
Citizens' Advice Bureaux Headquarters	109,000
Voluntary Sports Organisations	1,407,567
Glencairn Community Association	181
Ulster Peoples College	7,524
Methodist College Inter-Schools Project	2,455
Sixth-formers Community Relations Project	127
Youth Clubs and Youth Organisations	1,486,479
Ulster American Folk Park	355,000
Workers' Educational Association	97,774
Educational Guidance Service for Adults	34,215
Retirement Association of Northern Ireland	4,000
Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research	163,802
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	3,000
British Association for the Advancement of Science	3,345
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges	56,560
League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers	9,019
Council for Education in World Citizenship	915
Ulster College of Music	6,809
Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies	1,640

	£
Christian Education Movement	468
Community of the Peace People	4,475
Irish Genealogical Association/Christian Heritage	475
Joint Ecumenical Talks Project	270
Community Relations Information Service	630
Federation for Ulster Local Studies	500
Community Relations in Schools—(East Belfast) Project	7,615
Federation of Women's Institutes (Northern Ireland)	1,000

	£
Department of Environment for Northern Ireland	
Antrim Ringing Group	480
British Trust for Ornithology	2,500
Copeland Bird Observatory	1,000
Irish Brent Geese Expedition	1,000
National Trust Strangford Lough Wildlife Scheme	32,500
North Down Ringing Group	400
Northern Ireland Bird Records Committee	435
Northern Ireland Ornithologists Club	580
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	12,594
Strangford Lough Wildfowlers Association	500
Ulster Game and Wildfowl Society	250
Ulster Trust for Nature Conservation	1,050
National Trust	415,000
Conservation Volunteers (NI)	75,080
Northern Ireland Council for Social Services	3,505
HEARTH Housing Association	9,554
Road Safety Council (NI)	65,000
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	41,593
Environmental Improvement Scheme	2,737
St. Oliver Plunkett Environmental Committee	41,350
Belfast Voluntary Welfare Society "Better Belfast" Project	20,040
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations	70,500
National Federation of Housing Association	200
Registered Housing Associations	41,413,371
Unregistered Housing Associations	66,725
Belfast Housing Aid Society	20,000
Tenants Participation Advisory Service	12,500
Community Technical Aid	10,000
Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland	
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society	48,248
Down Royal Corporation of Horse Breeders	55,866
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster	46,000
Various Show Societies	1,695
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	125
Seed Potato Promotions Ltd	130,000

	£
Department of Economic Development	
The Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions	80,000
Action for Community Employment (funded 860 projects in private and voluntary sector organisations)	9,724,000
Community Volunteering Scheme (funded 24 voluntary sector organisations)	523,000
Youth Community Projects (funded 27 projects in private and voluntary sector organisations)	877,539
Community Workshops	12,094,737
Younghelp	587,175
National Trust	171,657
Incorporated Cripples Institutes and Holiday Homes	46,942
Thomas Doran Training Centre	264,856
Glencraig Village Community	88,742
Mourne Grange Village Community	154,923
Clanabogan Village Community	8,000
Royal National Institute for the Blind	10,309
Irish Linen Guild	9,148
Automation Centre (Queen's University Belfast)	47,250
Wolfson Signal Processing Unit (Queen's University Belfast)	7,000
The Lambeg Industrial Research Association	96,439
Occupational Respiratory Surveillance Scheme	15,217
Occupational Health Survey	2,789
Northern Ireland Consumer Council	50,000
University of Ulster (CAD Engineer) R & D Purposes	25,279
The Scottish-Irish Trust of Ulster	99,042
The Railway Preservation Society	2,700
YMCA	4,466

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the steps which his Department takes to ensure that grant-aid given to voluntary bodies and organisations, whether directly or indirectly, is not used for political purposes.

Dr. Boyson: All expenditure on Government grant-aid to voluntary bodies and organisations in Northern Ireland is subject to careful scrutiny to ensure that it is used for the genuine purpose of improving social, environmental or economic conditions in areas of need. There are special circumstances in Northern Ireland requiring particular care in administering grant-aid, and where it is considered that payment of grant would not be in the public interest, no grant is paid.

LEDU (Assistance)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about assistance to the Local Economic Development Unit from the youth enterprise scheme.

Dr. Boyson: The youth enterprise scheme, which is administered by Practical Action in Northern Ireland, is an excellent example of the private and public sectors pooling their resources to provide help for young people wishing to start their own businesses. The scheme is designed to create a more supportive environment for such young people by providing funding, equipment and professional advice. The Local Enterprise Development Unit, Northern Ireland's small firms agency, fully supports the initiative and is making available £300,000 over the next three years to assist the scheme on condition that this is matched on a pound-for-pound basis by the private sector.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mink

Mr. Maclean asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the action he is taking to limit the destruction caused by mink.

Mrs. Fenner: Wild mink are not a significant agricultural pest, although they are predators of wildfowl, poultry, fisheries and game.

The Ministry provides specialist advice to occupiers and others on control methods and also loans traps free of charge.

Cash Limits

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether it is proposed to change the cash limit on any departmental Vote for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Jopling: Yes. Following underspending on a number of services, the cash limit for class III, vote 4

(Other Agricultural and Food Services and Support for the Fishing Industry) is being reduced by £600,000 from £144,683,000 to £144,083,000 and that for class III, vote 5 (Departmental Research, Advisory Services and Administration) by £500,000 from £207,248,000 to £206,748,000. These reductions are in addition to the savings I anncunced on 12 December, at column 728, in reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and together they will partly offset increased expenditure, subject to parliamentary approval, of £20,296,000 on class III vote 3 (Agricultural Support, Animal Health, Land Drainage and Flood Protection) which is not subject to a cash limit and for which a supplementary estimate will be presented to Parliament shortly. The balance of this increase not covered by offsetting savings will be charged to the Reserve, and there will therefore be no net addition to the planning total of public expenditure.

PRIME MINISTER

British Leyland

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Prime Minister what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the effect on *(a)* employment and *(b)* the United Kingdom manufacturing base of the possible sale of British Leyland divisions to United States companies.

The Prime Minister: The Government's aim is to secure a strong vehicle manufacturing base in the United Kingdom. Only efficient operating units producing competitive products which people at home and abroad want to buy will strengthen the manufacturing base and guarantee jobs in the long term.

EMPLOYMENT

Women

Mr. Holt asked the Paymaster General (1) how many women were in full-time employment as at 1 January in each of the years 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985; (2) how many women were in part-time employment as at 1 January in each of the years 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985.

Mr. Lang: The following table gives, for the December preceding each of the dates specified, the numbers of female employees in employment and of females in self employment in Great Britain. Figures are not available for January. Estimates of full-time and part-time female employees are not separately available for dates before 1971, and are available only for June between 1971 and 1977. Estimates of females in full-time and part-time self employment are not separately available.

Females in Employment in Great Britain (thousands)

December each year	*Employees in Employment*		*Self Employed*	*All females*
	Full time	*Part time*		
1959	n/a	n/a	†326	7,577
1964	n/a	n/a	†350	8,349
1969	n/a	n/a	†368	8,603
*1974	n/a	n/a	378	9,407
1979	5,626	3,918	366	9,910
1984	4,963	4,283	614	9,859

n/a Not available.

* The Census of Employment shows 5,512 full time and 3,421 part time female employees in June 1974.

† Self employment figures prior to 1971 are not fully consistent with those for later years.

Rationalisation (Employment Effects)

Mr. Adley asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on his assessment of the effect of rationalisation on employment.

Mr. Lang: Rationalisation which helps to improve efficiency and competitiveness helps also to generate wealth, and, ultimately, employment.

Local Enterprise Agencies

Mr. Leigh asked the Paymaster General how many local enterprise agencies have been established.

Mr. Trippier: There are currently 314 local enterprise agencies in the United Kingdom, of which 231 meet the requirements of the Finance Act 1982, which allows private sector sponsors tax relief on their contributions to such bodies.

Sunderland

Mr. Clay asked the Paymaster General what was the number of job vacancies registered at Sunderland jobcentres at the latest available date; and how many of these were *(a)* part-time, *(b)* situated outside the Sunderland travel-to-work area and *(c)* funded by community programme, or other special employment measures.

Mr. Lang: The number of vacancies (excluding those funded by special employment measures) registered at Sunderland jobcentre remaining unfilled on 3 January 1986 was 477, of which 53 were part-time (that is for fewer than 30 hours per week). In addition, there were 159 unfilled vacancies funded by special employment measures, of which 42 involved work for fewer than 35 hours per week.

The exact location of vacancies relating to travel-to-work area boundaries could be established only at disproportionate cost, but it is known that all vacancies registered at Sunderland jobcentre are in the Sunderland area.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what fresh proposals Her Majesty's Government intend to make on verification of nuclear tests and a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Renton: None. The United Kingdom tabled a paper on seismic monitoring for a comprehensive test ban at the conference on disarmament in July 1985. This followed two earlier United Kingdom papers. We are disappointed that these papers have not yet received due attention in what is a useful forum for discussion of these issues.

Mr. Raoul Wallenberg

Mr. Franks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any request

from the Swedish Government for assistance in establishing the reason for the non-return of the body of Raoul Wallenberg after his reported death in a Soviet prison.

Mr. Renton: We have made it clear to the Swedish authorities that we stand ready to help them to establish with greater certainty what has happened to Raoul Wallenberg, and accordingly remain in contact with them on this subject. The Swedish Government have not, however, asked us for assistance in pursuing the particular question raised by my hon. Friend.

DEFENCE

Falkland Islands (Swimming Pool)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what cost estimates have been made for the proposed swimming pool at Mount Pleasant in the Falklands.

Mr. Stanley: If it is decided to build a swimming pool at Mount Pleasant, it is currently estimated that the cost will be somewhere between £1 million and £2 million depending upon the form of construction used and the specification.

Defence Arms Control Unit

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the funding of the Ministry of Defence defence arms control unit.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Police Training

Mr. Anderson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which countries Britain has provided training for police and special force personnel during 1985 *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* overseas; and what training is expected to be provided during 1986.

Mr. Raison: In 1985 Britain provided police training for the following countries:

(a) In Britain
Anguilla
Antigua
Australia
Bahamas
Bangladesh
Bahrain
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Botswana
Brunei
British Virgin Islands
Cyprus
Canada
Denmark
Ethiopia
Egypt
France
Fiji
Gambia
Guyana
Gibraltar
Grenada
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Italy
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Kiribati
Lesotho
Luxembourg
Malaysia
Maldives
Mauritius
Montserrat
Netherlands
Nepal
New Zealand
Nigeria
Oman
Portugal
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
St. Helena
St. Vincent
Sri Lanka
Swaziland
Tonga
Tanzania
Uganda
United States of America
Vanuatu
West Germany
Yemen Arab Republic
Zambia
Zimbabwe

(b) Overseas
Anguilla
Antigua and Barbuda
Bangladesh
Bahamas
Belize
British Virgin Islands
Barbados
Cayman Islands
Dominica
Gambia
Grenada
Indonesia
Jamaica
Kenya
Kuwait
Lesotho
Malawi
Montserrat
Oman
Pakistan
Swaziland
St. Lucia
St. Kitts and Nevis
St. Vincent
Tanzania
Turks and Caicos Islands
Uganda
Vanuatu
Zambia

The training was arranged by a number of Government Departments, principally the ODA and the Home Office. Some of it was paid for by the British Government, for example under the aid programme, and some by the countries themselves.

It is not our practice to provide details of training for special force personnel.

For 1986 it is too early to say what police training is expected to be provided but the pattern is unlikly to be very different from 1985.

SCOTLAND

Sewerage

Mr. Robert C. Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of houses in Scotland are connected to the public sewerage system; how this compares with other member states of the European Community; and how this compares with the United States of America.

Mr. Ancram: Information about the percentage of houses in Scotland connected to the public sewerage system is not available. It is however estimated that about 94 per cent. of the population of Scotland live in accommodation so connected. The other information requested is not held by the Scottish Development Department, but I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction at the Department of the Environment.

Wages (Statistics)

Mr. Allen Adams asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what figures he has on the number of people earning wages below supplementary benefit levels in Strathclyde.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This information is not available. Details of earnings in Strathclyde can be obtained from the "New Earnings Survey 1985", part E, available in the Library of the House, but this survey does not collect any information on household circumstances, and supplementary benefit levels cannot therefore be derived for comparative purposes.

Dementia

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the report on "Dementia in Scotland" produced by Scottish Action on Dementia, a copy of which has been forwarded to him.

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the very recent publication of this report as a clear statement of what its authors see as the main needs of persons suffering from dementia and the pattern of services which they may require either at home or, where necessary, in residential care or in hospital. I shall certainly wish to give careful consideration to the recommendations addressed to me on the provision of health and social work services, finance, research and other matters.

Rates

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated income from non-domestic rates for each Scottish local authority in this financial year; and what level of uniform non-domestic rate poundage would produce the same total non-domestic rate income.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows. The estimate is arrived at by multiplying the 1985-86 non-domestic rateable value figure for each authority by its rate poundage. The figures used are those in "Rating Review" published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (Scottish Branch) in August 1985. This estimate of rate income is overstated since relief on empty property, appeals and other factors will reduce the actual income received. On the same basis, a uniform rate poundage of 64·8p would produce the same total non-domestic rate income.

	£ million
Regions	
Borders	10·150
Central	50·510
Dumfries and Galloway	16·262
Fife	68·975
Grampian	82·226
Highland	30·623
Lothian	133·830
Strathclyde	364·638
Tayside	57·569
Districts	
Berwickshire	0·344
Ettrick and Lauderdale	0·908
Roxburgh	0·846
Tweeddale	0·286
Clackmannan	2·339
Falkirk	11·239
Stirling	6·003
Annandale and Eskdale	0·792
Nithsdale	1·633
Stewartry	0·402
Wigtown	0·477
Dunfermline	5·050
Kirkcaldy	8·831
North East Fife	2·040
Aberdeen City	20·583
Banff and Buchan	2·849
Gordon	0·968
Kincardine and Deeside	0·707
Moray	2·283
Badenoch and Strathspey	0·397
Caithness	0·470
Inverness	2·551
Lochaber	0·891
Nairn	0·221
Ross and Cromarty	1·240
Skye and Lochalsh	0·215
Sutherland	0·200
East Lothian	3·219
Edinburgh City	32·441
Midlothian	2·975
West Lothian	5·086
Argyll and Bute	2·962
Bearsden and Milngavie	0·943
Clydebank	3·178
Clydesdale	1·506
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2·397
Cumnock and Doon Valley	1·132
Cunninghame	8·491
Dumbarton	5·349
East Kilbride	3·214
Eastwood	1·091
Glasgow City	88·700
Hamilton	5·624
Inverclyde	6·011
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4·106
Kyle and Carrick	5·717
Monklands	4·856
Motherwell	8·602
Renfrew	14·000
Strathkelvin	2·985
Angus	2·470
Dundee City	12·936
Perth and Kinross	4·296
Islands Councils	
Orkney	10·498
Shetland	36·477
Western Isles	4·353
SCOTLAND TOTAL	1,175·163

Cervical Screening

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the availability of a national cervical screening facility in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: Health boards already provide cervical cytology services in Scotland and, despite backlogs that have built up in one or two areas, these services are operating satisfactorily. There is no justification for setting up a national cervical screening facility in Scotland.

SDA and HIDB

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail all moneys which have been recouped from the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands development board, respectively, for each financial year since 1980, stating in each case whether any sums involved relate to *(a)* profits realised through the sale of shareholdings or assets, *(b)* underspend from existing budgets at the time, and *(c)* any other sources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There have been no occasions on which the Highlands and Islands Development Board has paid moneys to the Exchequer. In cases where the board did not spend the budgeted amounts approved by Parliament or obtained receipts which were not used for higher than budgeted spending there would be a reduced need for payments of grant-in-aid by my Department to the board.

A similar position applies to the Scottish Development Agency in respect of expenditure and assets funded by grant-in-aid. In addition the agency may, for its industrial investment function, borrow money from the national loans fund and receive payments of public dividend capital. Repayments of NLF borrowings arise in the normal way and have been as follows:

	Principal £	*Interest* £
1980-81	751,721	1,321,959
1981-82	524,033	805,271
1982-83	525,727	1,088,364
1983-84	949,161	1,142,684
1984-85	3,580,015	1,197,457

The agency's Act has from the outset provided for the possibility of annual payments to the Secretary of State from the agency in consideration of public dividend capital received. No such payment has to date been made. The agency made one exceptional repayment of £532,494, in April 1980, as a consequence of a reclassification of that amount from public dividend capital to part of the agency's capital debt.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman or chief executive of the Scottish Development Agency; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Alan Stewart: My right hon. and learned Friend met the chairman and chief executive of the agency on Friday 17 January to discuss the agency's budgetary provision for the present financial year.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend met Mr. Cowan on 17 January 1986 to discuss budgetary provision for the present financial year.

Government Expenditure

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the Scottish commentary on the public expenditure White Paper: "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1986-87 to 1988-89", Cmnd. 9702.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department is issuing today "Public Expenditure to 1988-89: A Commentary on the Scotland Programme" which gives more information about the public expenditure within my responsibility. I have arranged for a copy to be sent to each right hon. and hon. Member representing a Scottish constituency and I shall be pleased to let any other hon. Member have a copy on request. Copies are also being placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

GATT

7. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress on the proposed new general agreement on tariff and trade round.

Mr. Alan Clark: The contracting parties to GATT agreed unanimously on 28 November 1985 to set up a preparatory committee for a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. Ministers are expected to make a formal decision to launch the new negotiations at a special meeting planned for this September.

Competition Policy

11. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied that all sectors of business, in particular independent grocery retailers, are benefiting from his Department's policies of competition.

Mr. Butcher: The Government's competition policy is designed to create a climate in which enterprises are able to compete on the basis of their perception of the market opportunities available. This will benefit the consumer by leading to improved service and keener prices, and will make United Kingdom industry and commerce as a whole more prosperous and competitive.

General Electric and Plessey (Merger)

18. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the proposed merger of the General Electric Company and Plessey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is due to make its report by 19 July.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

22. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he plans to make a statement on the current state of negotiations on the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Negotiations in the GATT on renewal of the MFA are still at an early stage, and discussions in the Community on a mandate for the negotiations are continuing. It is too early to say whether we are likely to achieve our objectives as described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 1985, but the Community has agreed that an extension of the MFA is needed.

33. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his policy towards the maintenance of an anti-surge mechanism in any renewed multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The anti-surge mechanism is one of a number of features of the present MFA which we, in conjunction with our Community partners, are examining in the negotiations on the renewal of the MFA. Our attitude to it will take account of the overall package on offer.

35. **Mr. Dixon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the Trades Union Congress textile committee concerning the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met the Trades Union Congress textile committee on 24 January to discuss the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement.

46. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to finalise the negotiating mandate in connection with the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Council of Ministers agreed on 27 January that the Council should try to agree on a Community negotiating mandate before the end of February.

48. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he proposes to give special treatment to the poorest supplier countries in negotiations to renew the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 9 May 1985, the Government are in favour of special treatment being given to the poorest supplier countries. The question of how such countries should be defined is still under discussion in the Community. In our view, the narrower the definition, the more favourable the treatment that could be given to such countries.

55. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals for social development he wants to see incorporated in any new multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I see no need to strengthen the existing references to social development in the multi-fibre arrangement.

60. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the negotiations relating to the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Negotiations in the GATT on renewal of the MFA are still at an early stage, and discussions in the Community on a mandate for the negotiations are continuing. It is too early to say whether we are likely to achieve our objectives as described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 1985, but the Community has agreed that an extension of the MFA is needed.

71. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with progress being made in negotiations relating to the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Negotiations in the GATT on renewal of the MFA are still at an early stage, and discussions in the Community on a mandate for the negotiations are continuing. It is too early to say whether we are likely to achieve our objectives as described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 1985, but the Community has agreed that an extension of the MFA is needed.

24. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations he has received concerning the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have received a very large number of representations from organisations representing employers and employees in the textile and clothing industries, consumers, importers, retailers, local authorities and individuals writing mainly on behalf of these interests or the development movement.

Textile and Clothing Industries

23. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest assessment of the contribution of the textile and clothing industries to total British exports.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The contribution of the textile and clothing industries to total United Kingdom exports is provisionally put at over £3 billion for 1985, representing nearly 4 per cent. of the total. These industries have maintained their percentage share of total exports in the last five years, despite strong competition in overseas markets.

68. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to assist the British textile and clothing industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The provision of specific Government aids to the textile and clothing industries is not permitted under present European Community policy. However, companies in these sectors can apply for assistance under the Department's national schemes of support and also through its regional schemes aimed at projects safeguarding and creating new jobs.

EC (Internal Market)

25. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress being made towards opening up the internal market within the Community.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Council adopted a number of measures in 1985 which will help remove barriers to trade in goods and services in the Community. The presidency action programme for 1986 lists more than a hundred further measures capable of adoption this year as part of the objective, agreed by successive European Councils, of completing the internal market by 1992.

Allied Lyons plc

26. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the result of his Department's consideration of the Elders IXL bid for Allied Lyons plc.

Mr. Channon: My right hon. and learned Friend, the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, announced the reference of this merger proposal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on 6 December. The commission was given six months in which to report.

As I am sure my hon. Friend appreciates, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the issues involved while the investigation is in progress.

Tin Industry

27. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to resolve the current crisis in the tin industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are continuing to make every effort to secure an acceptable settlement of the International Tin Council's obligations and a return to orderly trading in tin.

65. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current situation within the tin mining industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are continuing to make every effort to ensure a successful outcome to the present session of the International Tin Council. The priority is to secure a return to orderly trading in tin.

Rates

28. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry and other employers' organisations on the effect of rates on industry's costs.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend looks forward to discussing the subject of rates with the CBI and other representative bodies, along with the level of earnings and other matters affecting industry's costs.

Steel Industry

29. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will meet the chairman of the British Steel Corporation to discuss the state of the steel industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend intends to meet the chairman, as well as other leaders of major public and private sector industries, as soon as can conveniently be arranged.

Anglo-Soviet Trade Commission

30. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the work of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Commission.

Mr. Alan Clark: The thirteenth session of the British-Soviet Joint Commission met in London on 6 and 7 February. During the session there were useful discussions on matters relating to economic, industrial, scientific and technological co-operation between the two countries. On 6 February, Mr. Manzhulo, leader of the Soviet delegation, and I initialled a new long-term programme for economic and industrial co-operation for the period 1980 to 1990. This highlights a number of areas in which there are excellent opportunities for British business in the Soviet market. I am placing a copy of the long-term programme and the joint agreed communiqué in the Library.

Gainsborough

31. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the amount of trade and industry grants given in the Gainsborough area since 1972.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Offers of regional selective financial assistance totalling £4·4 million have been made since 1 April 1982, of which £3·2 million has been paid.

Assistance under the Science and Technology Act is available nationally. Grants totalling £32,000 have been made to support innovative projects in the Gainsborough TTWA.

Gainsborough will also have been able to benefit from several other departmental schemes of assistance which have been available nationally from time to time, but records have not been kept on a detailed geographical basis.

Westland plc

32. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement about government assistance in the future for the Westland helicopter company.

Mr. Pattie: Outstanding sums amounting to about £57 million remain to be paid to the company by my Department in launch aid and other assistance, principally in relation to the EH101 project. Westland will continue to be eligible for Government assistance in the future on the same basis as other aerospace companies in the private sector.

70. **Mr. David Young** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Government policy on the current position of the Westland helicopter company.

Mr. Pattie: An extraordinary general meeting of Westland shareholders is taking place today at which proposals for a financial reconstruction of the company are being considered.

Balance of Payment

34. **Mr. Bright** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the latest balance of payments figures.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1985, the current account of the balance of payments is provisionally estimated to have been in surplus by £3·5 billion—the sixth successive annual surplus.

Bankruptcies

36. **Mr. McCartney** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will indicate how many bankruptcies there have been in the last 12 months.

47. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the number of bankruptcies there have been in the last 12 months.

Mr. Butcher: The provisional figure for bankruptcies in England and Wales in 1985 was 6,672. Receiving orders and administration orders are included and the total is the net number of cases administered after consolidations and rescissions.

British Shipbuilders (Privatisation)

37. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in the privatisation of British Shipbuilders' warship building yards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: British Shipbuilders has already sold four of its warship building yards: Yarrow Shipbuilders Ltd; Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd.; Brooke Marine Ltd.; and Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd. Negotiations are well in hand for the sale of the others: Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd., including its subsidiary Cammell Laird Ltd.; and Hall Russell Ltd.

National Economic Development Council

38. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when next he plans to attend the National Economic Development Council; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Channon: On 5 March. The agenda for the meeting has not yet been agreed.

Industrial Regeneration

39. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to meet the Confederation of British Industry and Trades Union Congress to discuss the regeneration of British industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend has accepted an invitation to meet the Confederation of British Industry on 26 February, when he expects to have a wide-ranging discussion. My right hon. Friend also meets both the CBI and Trades Union Congress regularly at meetings of the National Economic Development Council where matters relevant to the performance of British industry are frequently discussed.

Patents System

40. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the operation of the patents system as it affects small businesses.

Mr. Pattie: Patent procedures in the United Kingdom are the same for all applicants and patentees whether they be large multinational companies, small businesses or private inventors.

Sir Robin Nicholson's Green Paper "Intellectural Property Rights and Innovation" (Cmnd. 9117) examined whether the existing systems for protecting intellectual property, including patents, are well suited to the national interest. It paid particular attention to the needs of small but enterprising businesses and considered whether any changes in the present systems might be of help to them.

A White Paper announcing the Government's overall response to the Green Paper will be published in the near future.

Civil Defence

41. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects his study of the role of industry in civil defence planning to be completed.

Mr. Pattie: On current plans, it is hoped that the assessment of the essential requirements which industry could be called on to supply for civil defence purposes, and industry's capability to meet them, will be substantially complete by the middle of next year.

Manufactured Goods

42. **Dr. Godman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will indicate the nature and size of the current deficit in the balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1985, trade in manufactures was in deficit by £3·1 billion. At the same time, the current account as a whole recorded its sixth successive surplus.

Blank Audio Tape

43. **Mr. Key** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has about the facilities which exist in the United Kingdom for the production of blank audio tape.

Mr. Pattie: Production facilities for blank audio tape in the United Kingdom are understood to be limited.

72. **Mr. Parris** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the quantity of blank audio tapes imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Pattie: The total number of magnetic audio tapes imported into the United Kingdom in the last five years is:

	Million
1981	77·7
1982	71·9
1983	86·6
1984	81·0
1985	95·2

Note: The 1985 figure is given on a provisional basis.
Source: SITC/R2 item 898.31 (part) in the United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics.

Manufactures (Deficits)

44. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what deficits on trade in manufactures were experienced by the United Kingdom with Germany and Japan, respectively, in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: In the 12 months from January to December 1985, the United Kingdom had provisional crude deficits in manufactures with the Federal Republic of Germany of £5·8 billion and with Japan of £3·2 billion.

Small Businesses

45. **Mr. Richard Page** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on British Overseas Trade Board assistance given to promote the export prospects of smaller businesses.

Mr. Alan Clark: While assistance from the British Overseas Trade Board is available to all exporters, the board's services are generally designed to be of particular relevance to smaller exporters. In fact about 75 per cent. of firms using BOTB services have fewer than 200 employees.

54. **Mr. Tim Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the accounting and audit requirements for small companies.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend will make a statement as soon as possible.

Trades Union Congress

49. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to meet the Trades Union Congress; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Channon: I have no immediate plans to do so, but of course I am always prepared to have such a meeting.

BSC (Phoenix 2)

50. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Steel Corporation regarding the progress of Phoenix 2; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend has not yet had an opportunity to meet the chairman of the British Steel Corporation.

City Fraud

51. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received regarding fraud in the City.

Mr. Butcher: The Department of Trade and Industry has received a number of representations from a variety of organisations and individuals.

Confederation of British Industry

52. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to meet the Confederation of British Industry; and what matters will be discussed.

67. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the Confederation of British Industry; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has accepted an invitation to meet the Confederation of British Industry on 26 February, when he expects to have a wide-ranging discussion. My right hon. Friend also meets the CBI regularly at meetings of the National Economic Development Council. The agenda for the next meeting has not yet been agreed.

Copyright Law

53. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received about the Green Paper relating to copyright law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Government have received many representations in response to the publication in February 1985 of the Green Paper "The Recording and Rental of Audio and Video Copyright Material" (Cmnd. 9445). Those making representations included copyright owners and performers; manufacturers and importers of recording equipment and blank recording tape; consumer organisations; educationists; and bodies working on behalf of the blind. Our conclusions on the issues raised in the Green Paper will be announced in a White Paper dealing with the whole of copyright law which is now in the final stages of preparation.

56. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the White Paper on recording and rental of audio and video copyright material.

Mr. Pattie: A White Paper dealing with copyright law is in the final stages of preparation. It will incorporate our conclusions in the areas of recording and rental of audio and video copyright material.

59. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he now expects to publish the White Paper on copyright law.

Mr. Pattie: A White Paper dealing with copyright law is in the final stages of preparation and I hope that publication will not be long delayed.

Scandinavia

57. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's trading prospects with Scandinavia.

Mr. Alan Clark: We have excellent trading relations with the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland), and United Kingdom firms delivered some £6,300 million of exports to those markets in 1985. I believe that they will offer continuing opportunities to United Kingdom exporters, and my Department and the British Overseas Trade Board are shortly embarking on a special campaign to highlight these.

Industry Year

58. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution his Department is making to Industry Year.

Mr. Butcher: The Department of Trade and Industry fully supports the designation of 1986 as Industry Year by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. It is contributing half the total central administrative costs of the initiative. The Department has also provided or funded secondees to help run the campaign and funded or supported Industry Year activities run by other organisations. The Department has launched new schemes for Industry Year, such as the mini-enterprise in schools project, and is linking and enhancing existing activities. Much existing departmental assistance to industry is contributing to the Industry Year objectives. Departmental Ministers are taking every opportunity to speak on the themes of Industry Year.

New Companies (Scotland)

61. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new companies were registered in Scotland during 1985.

Mr. Butcher: During 1985, a total of 5,417 new companies were registered in Scotland.

Manufacturing Output

62. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for output in manufacturing industry; and how this compares with the figure for the same month six years ago.

Mr. Alan Clark: The index of production for manufacturing industry in the three months up to November 1985 stood at 105, based on 1980 equal to 100. This is 3 per cent. lower than for the corresponding period in 1979.

Vauxhall Motors

63. **Mr. John Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of Vauxhall Motors, Luton; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of Vauxhall Motors since assuming his

duties as Secretary of State. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) met the chairman of Vauxhall Motors on 3 December 1985, however, for a general discussion about Vauxhall's future plans in the United Kingdom. During the meeting, Vauxhall announced plans for investment of £8·7 million at its Ellesmere Port plant, creating 600 jobs and boosting output to enable 64 per cent. of its projected 1986 domestic sales to be met from United Kingdom production. It also announced a 1986 United Kingdom content target of 60 per cent. for those vehicles.

Advanced Technology

64. **Mr. Patrick Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the application of advanced technology by manufacturing firms.

Mr. Butcher: In 1984, the last year for which complete outturn figures were available, investment in manufacturing industry amounted to £6·4 billion at 1980 prices and it is expected that the outturn for 1985 will be nearly £6·8 billion at 1980 prices, an increase of 6 per cent. above the level for 1984. The amount of investment in advanced technology is included in these figures but is not collected separately.

Some indication of investment in the application of advanced technology in engineering manufacture is given by a survey showing that the installed base of computers, software and hardware, for engineering was £900 million in 1985, an increase of 100 per cent. over 1984. A survey on the use of microelectronics estimated that 47 per cent. of manufacturing firms were using this technology in their products and processes in 1983.

Insurance and Financial Services

66. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek to introduce new proposals to extend competition in insurance and financial services throughout the European Economic Community.

Mr. Butcher: It is primarily for the Commission, not for individual member states, to make proposals. The United Kingdom fully supports the establishment of a genuinely common market in insurance and other financial services, and we hope that rapid progress can now be made in accordance with the decisions of the Milan summit in June 1985.

British Steel Corporation

69. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made toward returning the British Steel Corporation to profitability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Butcher: Excluding the cost of the miners' strike, the corporation made a profit in 1984-85, after interest and before exceptional items, of £40 million. The comparable figure for 1979-80 was a loss of £538 million. This is an impressive recovery, and the strategy announced last August points the way to sustained profitability for BSC.

I am now able to inform the house that BSCs external financing limit for 1985-86 is being increased from £360 million to £414 million. This will enable BSC to implement the decisions announced last August.

Inmos

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take any steps to prevent ownership of Inmos passing outside European hands.

Mr. Butcher: Control of Inmos now rests in the private sector with Thorn-EMI. The future ownership of this subsidiary is a matter for Thorn-EMI, not the Government.

Electromagnetic Radiation

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information is available to his Department on the risks of electromagnetic radiation to computer security identified by the Netherlands postal and telephone authority; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Butcher: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his previous question on Monday 10 February at column *356*.

Departmental Papers (Access)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there are any restrictions on access by him to papers of previous Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry in the present Administration: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: No.

Systime plc

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the proposed takeover by DEC of Systime plc, Leeds, to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1986]: The proposed takeover by DEC of part of the operations of Systime plc does not qualify under the provisions of section 64 of the Fair Trading Act for reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. To qualify for investigation under the Act, a merger or proposed merger must either create or enhance a market share of 25 per cent. or more or involve a target company with assets of over £30 million. Neither of these criteria was satisfied in this case.

Daya Nuclear Power Plant

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry why officials of banks involved in the financing of the Daya nuclear power plant have been required to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1986]: Non-civil servants given access to official information are bound by the Official Secrets Act. In this case, because of the extent of Government involvement in negotiations, the sensitivity of relations with the French and Chinese Governments, and the need for close liaison between the Government and the banks, it was decided that the bankers most closely associated with the project should sign a declaration under the Act.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inflation

Mr. Leigh asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current rate of inflation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Over the 12 months to December 1985, the retail prices index increased by 5·7 per cent.

Interest Rates

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implications for the economy of the recent level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The level of interest rates is only one of the factors affecting the economy. This year we expect the economy to continue the steady growth that we have seen for the past five years.

Mr. Bruce asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the United Kingdom's present position with regard to the level of interest rates in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development league tables; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Interest rates in several OECD countries are higher than in the United Kingdom.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the exchange rate.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The sterling index closed at 74·2 on 11 February 1986.

Mr. Bruce asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effects on the economy of recent levels of the deutschmark/sterling exchange rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The effects of the exchange rate of any currency against the pound depend on how long that particular exchange rate is sustained, on the pattern of other exchange rates and on the reaction of prices, wages and interest rates in both countries.

Unincorporated Businesses

Mr. Watts asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the number of new unincorporated businesses which made income tax returns for the first time in respect of each of the last three financial years; and what were the related tax yields in aggregate for each of those years.

Mr. Moore: I regret that records of the returns received from unincorporated businesses are not maintained in a form which would enable those made for the first time to be distinguished.

Governor of the Bank of England

Mr. Livsey asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England; and what was discussed.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 16 January 1986, at column *649*.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received advocating the abolition of stamp duty on all stock transfers.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I have received 16 such representations.

North Sea Oil Revenue

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will give an approximate estimate of likely total North sea oil revenues for 1986-87 on the assumption of a crude oil price per barrel of $10, $15, $20 and $25, on the basis of an exchange rate of $1·35 to the pound; and whether he will give the same figures on the basis of $1·30, $1·25 and $1·20 to the pound.

Mr. Moore: A new forecast of North sea revenues for 1986-87 will be published at Budget time.

Education Fees

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to make fees paid by individuals for continuing education tax-deductible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Board and Lodging

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what instructions he has given to his headquarters staff, division SB3C, on the administration of the new exceptional hardship exemption in the supplementary benefit board and lodging regulations; and whether he will place a copy of those instructions in the Library.

Mr. Newton: No instructions incorporating hard and fast rules have been issued for the operation of the discretionary power to which the hon. Member refers. The discretionary exemption can only be administered properly after taking account of the relevant circumstances in each individual case. Indeed, to do otherwise would be inconsistent with the legal basis for the discretion. The first consideration in every case is whether the claimant's circumstances in fact qualify him for exemption under the extensive list of exemptions specified in the regulations. Beyond that, a range of factors is considered, including the special reasons advanced by the claimant, or on his behalf, the personal circumstances of the claimant as they affect the need for board and lodging accommodation in the particular locality, the character of the accommodation concerned and any alternative options available to the claimant.

Social Security (Appeals)

Mr. Harvey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his practice regarding intervening when a statement of grounds in an appeal under section 93 of the Social Security Act is identical to the original statement of grounds in his Department's decision, although new evidence has been presented at that appeal and although the statute requires that any opinion previously expressed is ignored.

Mr. Major: An intervention by the Secretary of State may not be made in respect of the content of a statement of grounds issued pursuant to regulation 14 of the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1984. I assume that my hon. Friend has a specific case in mind, and if the details are provided I will write to him.

Mrs. Gillian Stringer

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letters of 12 November and 2 January referring to Mrs. Gillian Stringer of Rugby.

Mr. Major: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 10 February.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to ensure that all generic medicines are labelled with their country of origin.

Mr. Hayhoe: The inclusion of this information on labels is not considered necessary. For any medicinal product, including a generic product, to be marketed in the United Kingdom, the Department of Health and Social Security as the Medicines Act licensing authority has to be satisfied that the product is safe, efficacious and of good quality under the Medicines Act 1968. This requirement applies irrespective of the country of origin. The licensing authority also has to be satisfied that the product has been manufactured to acceptable standards under United Kingdom (or European Community) licensing arrangements.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a breakdown of the number of social security claimants in Leyton and Leytonstone at the latest date for which figures are available and at the comparable date in each year since 1979 broken down by pensioners aged 80 years and over, pensioners aged 60 to 79 years, sick and disabled, one-parent families, low-paid families, unemployed families, single people, childless couples, widows and others.

Mr. Major: The London postal districts of Leyton and Leytonstone are covered by the Department's office at Leytonstone although the boundaries are not conterminous.

Figures of people receiving supplementary benefit from that office at December 1985—the latest available—and at comparable dates in the years since 1980 — the earliest available—are available only in the following form:

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Persons under pension age excluding the unemployed	1,295	1,514	1,773	2,097	2,527	2,594
Unemployed persons	1,483	2,814	3,421	3,642	3,765	4,084
Persons over pension age	3,545	3,620	3,625	3,316	3,016	3,301

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if any research into cot deaths is being undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The Department funded a major research project into post-neonatal mortality. The report of the study, which was co-ordinated by Professor Knowelden, was published in January 1985 and was followed by a conference to promote a full discussion of the issues raised.

No further research into the sudden infant death syndrome (cot death) is currently being funded by the Department. We are, however, pursuing a number of recommendations resulting from the Knowelden report. Details were outlined in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) on 11 February. We have also expressed our concern to the Medical Research Council about the importance of further research into finding the cause of infant deaths for which full post mortems offer no explanation.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many representations he has received from the medical profession and the voluntary organisations on the voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising and health warnings; how many meetings he has had with them; and how many meetings he has had with the tobacco industry since October 1985.

Mr. Whitney: Thirty-five written representations have been received from health interests since July. Ministers have met the chairman and officers of the Health Education Council. Five meetings with tobacco industry representatives have been held at ministerial or official level since October, and further meetings are planned.

Home Help

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will include in social security benefit payments a sum to cover the costs of home help provision.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to change the long-standing position that payments are not made where the home help is provided by a local authority. Local authorities have powers to waive charges for such provision in the case of people with low incomes, including people in receipt of supplementary benefit. There is provision in the supplementary benefit scheme to allow additional benefit for the cost of essential domestic help if it is not provided by a local authority.

Artificial Limbs

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many complaints his Department has received about ill-fitting artificial limbs for each year since 1979.

Mr. Newton: The number of complaints about ill-fitting limbs referred to Ministers is as follows:

	Number
1979	5
1980	6
1981	2
1982	3
1983	6
1984	5
1985	8

No record is kept centrally of complaints made direct to artificial limb and appliance centres.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what checks are undertaken by his Department on the standard of work carried out by prosthetists.

Mr. Newton: The supervision of prosthetic standards is one of the responsibilities of medical officers employed in the aritificial limb service in England. They allocate each patient to a particular limb contractor, and examine new limbs and sockets to ensure that they conform to the prescription and are an accurate and comfortable fit before delivery is accepted.

Frimley Park Hospital

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the average time patients have to wait for an orthopaedic operation at Frimley park hospital;

(2) what is the longest time a patient is now waiting for an orthopaedic operation at Frimley park hospital.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks. Reliable estimates for individual hospitals cannot be made from the sample information held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the West Surrey and North East Hampshire district health authority who may be able to provide the information requested.

Kidney Units

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list newly established units for the provision of dialysis for patients suffering from end stage renal disease which first treated patients in 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and those planned to start treatment in 1986 and 1987.

Mr. Whitney: The European Dialysis and Transplant Association received its first information on patients being accepted for treatment for end stage renal failure from the following units in the years shown:

	Unit
1982	Shrewsbury
1983	Kings Lynn
1984	Rochester
1985	Preston

We are also aware of a number of minimal care dialysis units which opened during these years but which submit information through the renal units with which they are associated. We expect that further new units will be established in 1986 and 1987, but this is a matter for the health authorities concerned.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will monitor centrally the impact of the establishment of new units for the provision of dialysis to patients with end stage renal disease in order to assess the speed with which the treatment levels in given regional health authorities can be brought into line with the guidelines set by him.

Mr. Whitney: The number of new patients accepted for treatment for end stage renal failure in each region is reviewed annually and the region's progress in meeting its agreed target is assessed; this review takes into account the numbers of patients accepted for treatment in new units.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make available to regional health authorities in England the results of the programme for the expansion of the provision of dialysis for patients with end stage renal disease in Wales.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that two subsidiary renal units were established at Carmarthen and Bangor in 1985 as part of the programme for expanding services for patients with end stage renal failure in Wales, and that the performance of these units is being evaluated over a three-year period. I will ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to keep me informed of the findings of this evaluation, and will make any relevant information available to regional health authorities.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has information available at sub-regional level, or on a district health authority basis, on the acceptance of patients on programmes for the treatment of end stage renal disease.

Mr. Whitney: The European Dialysis and Transplant Association is able to provide information on the numbers of patients accepted for treatment for end stage renal failure by each renal unit; I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) on 25 June 1985 at columns *378-82*. Information is not collected on the district health authorities within which the patients reside.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether the quota system introduced by the Lancashire ambulance service conforms with the requirements of circular HC(78)45 on "Ambulance Services: Operational Control and Use";

(2) whether he has received any representations regarding the introduction of a quota system by Lancashire ambulance service;

(3) if he will investigate whether the Preston health authority in introducing a quota system for the Lancashire ambulance service has acted in accordance with paragraph 19 of the Community Health Council's regulations 1985 statutory instrument 304/1985, in respect of notifying community health councils in Lancashire of the substantial variation in the provision of ambulance services.

Mr. Whitney: I understand Preston health authority is trying to control unnecessary ambulance journeys. Where

there is medical need for transport by the ambulance service it is being provided. This meets the requirements of HC(78)45 and does not appear to represent a substantial variation in service. We have received no representations about this.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services according to the most recent available figures how many claimants are in receipt of unemployment benefit at less than the full rate *(a)* by sex and martial status and *(b)* where married, by sex and employment status of spouse.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Single Payments

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* how many attended appeals were made to the supplementary benefit appeals tribunal regarding single payments for exceptional needs, *(b)* how many of those appeals were decided in the claimant's favour, *(c)* how many attended appeals were made by women, *(d)* how many of these appeals were decided in the claimant's favour, *(e)* how many attended appeals were made by lone parents, *(f)* how many of these appeals were decided in the claimant's favour, *(g)* how many attended appeals were made by lone mothers and *(h)* how many of these appeals were decided in the claimant's favour.

Mr. Major: A revised statistical system for social security appeals was introduced in April 1984 and the information following is therefore in respect of the nine months period from 1 April to 31 December 1984. Information is not available on the sex or marital status of the appellant. Over the nine months period it is estimated that there were some 2·6 million decisions made on claims for supplementary benefit single payments of which some 2·1 million resulted in an award. In the same period there were 27,930 appeals heard and decided on single payment questions. The pattern of representation and attendance is shown in the table.

Social security appeals on supplementary benefit single payments
April-December 1984

Attendance and Representation	*Number of appeals heard and decided*	*Decided in appellant's favour*	*Percentage in appellant's favour*
(a) Appellant only	9,365	2,680	28·6
(b) Appellant and representative	5,472	2,592	47·4
(c) Representative only	1,152	443	38·5
All attendances	15,989	5,715	35·7
(d) Neither attended nor represented	11,941	973	8·1
Total appeals heard and decided	27,930	6,688	23·9

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many couples there are without dependent children where the husband is in receipt of supplementary benefit and the wife is employed 24 or more hours per week; and how many couples there are without dependent children where the wife is in receipt of supplementary benefit and the husband is employed 24 or more hours per week.

Mr. Major: It is regretted that the information is not available.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will authorise the outside advisers who contributed to his reviews of the social security system to publish their advice.

Mr. Newton: The outside members of the review teams were appointed to advise Ministers, and it would not be appropriate for them to discuss the teams' proceedings. They are free to comment on the Government's published proposals; and the report of the housing benefit review team, which was composed entirely of outside members, has been published.

Rehabilitation Centre (Sale)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about the proposed sale, of an existing operational National Health Service rehabilitation centre in the Thames valley area to Private Medical Centres plc; why the sale of such a centre is being proposed; how many such centres exist in the National Health Service; what is the current level of demand for these services within the National Health Service; and what is the price being sought for this centre.

Mr. Hayhoe: I understand that East Berkshire district health authority will be considering options for the future of the rehabilitation centre at Farnham park shortly, but that the options currently under consideration do not include sale in the short term. The hon. Member might like to approach the chairman of the authority direct for any further information.

In England, 12 such rehabilitation centres exist, together with six miners' rehabilitation centres.

I regret that detailed information on the current level of demand is not held centrally.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Powley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to inform members of occupational pension schemes of their new rights under the Social Security Act 1985.

Mr. Major: Advertisements advising employees who are changing jobs that they now have the right to transfer their accrued pension benefits to a new employer's scheme, or to use them to buy an insurance policy or annuity to provide themselves with a pension, were placed in the national press from 12 January. An information sheet providing employees with further information which is available from my Department has attracted considerable interest and we have so far issued some 12,000 copies. I am placing a copy of this information sheet in the Library.

Local Offices (Brent)

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the approximate turnover of staff in grades of clerical assistant and clerical officers, respectively, in social security offices open to the public covering the Brent, East constituency, together with maximum and minimum rates of turnover naming the offices concerned.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986]: Following is the information for the year ending 31 December 1985.

Turnover is defined as those staff who leave the Department (including those who retire) change offices within the Department or are promoted within an office. The number of staff who leave the Department (including those who retire) is lower. Both sets of figures are set out in the table.

	Number	*Per cent.*
Clerical Assistant		
Total turnover	25·5	47·2
Total of leavers	10·5	19·4
Turnover		
Maximum rate: Cricklewood ILO	9	64·3
Minimum rate: Neasden ILO	8	36·4
Leavers		
Maximum rate: Cricklewood ILO	4	28·6
Minimum rate: Harlesden ILO	2·5	13·9
Clerical Officer		
Total turnover	48	27
Total of leavers	40	22·5
Turnover		
Maximum rate: Neasden ILO	25	35·7
Minimum rate: Harlesden ILO	11	16·9
Leavers		
Maximum rate: Neasden ILO	20	28·6
Minimum rate: Harlesden ILO	10	15·4

Abbreviation: ILO=Integrated Local Office.

Supplementary Benefits Handbook

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects that the new supplementary benefits handbook taking account of changes in benefit rates in November 1985 will be published.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 February 1986, c. *89*]: It has not been the practice automatically to produce a new edition of the handbook each year; none was published for the years 1971, 1973, 1975, 1978 or 1981. Taking account of various factors, including the greater frequency of upratings in 1985-87, it is not proposed to publish a new edition giving the November 1985 rates. Further editions of a handbook will be considered in the light of the changes proposed in the current Social Security Bill.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 February 1986

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates

Mr. Hardy asked the Attorney-General how many people serve as magistrates at the present time; what was the average number of sessions each served in 1985; and what were the figures five years ago.

The Attorney-General: On 1 January 1986 in England and Wales 16,133 men and 11,554 women were serving as active justices of the peace. In January 1981 the figures were respectively 15,951 and 9,484. The average attendances in 1980 and 1985 could not be ascertained except at disproportionate cost, but an estimate would be between 35 and 40 half-day sittings in each of the two years.

Witnesses (Oath)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Attorney-General what representations have been received by the Law Officers' Department from churchmen and others concerning the proposed change in the ancient form of oath taken by witnesses before giving evidence in court; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have received no representations on this matter.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Dr. Cunningham asked the Paymaster General if he will give a detailed breakdown of unemployed claimants in the Copeland parliamentary constituency using the most recent figures of 9 January, analysed by sex and by the age of the unemployed and duration of unemployment.

Mr. Lang: Following is the requested information, which is available in the Library.

Age and Duration Analysis of the Unemployed for Statistical Date 9 January 1986
Parliamentary Constituencies

Copeland CC

Males

Duration of Unemployment in weeks	*Under 17*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20-24*	*25-29*	*30-34*	*35-39*	*40-44*	*45-49*	*50-54*	*55-59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
One or less	0	1	5	4	11	5	12	4	2	5	4	3	2	58
Over 1 and up to 2	2	1	1	1	11	4	4	6	0	4	0	1	1	36
Over 2 and up to 4	2	3	4	5	29	7	12	10	8	3	3	1	3	90
Over 4 and up to 6	1	7	4	2	22	8	15	6	1	5	1	9	0	81
Over 6 and up to 8	2	3	2	5	25	7	13	10	5	2	4	6	0	84
Over 8 and up to 13	8	17	19	11	53	33	22	14	14	16	11	9	4	231
Over 13 and up to 26	26	42	28	29	117	52	36	36	30	22	29	21	14	482
Over 26 and up to 39	2	20	17	13	83	36	28	9	16	19	6	9	12	270
Over 39 and up to 52	0	1	12	17	36	20	20	10	16	7	13	20	6	178
Over 52 and up to 65	0	4	9	8	36	32	15	18	10	5	9	15	4	165
Over 65 and up to 78	0	8	8	10	24	30	17	24	18	20	71	36	1	267
Over 78 and up to 104	0	0	8	5	40	25	17	14	8	12	9	37	0	175
Over 104 and up to 156	0	0	2	15	40	33	22	20	11	16	19	44	0	222
Over 156 and up to 208	0	0	0	2	34	35	25	15	15	13	12	30	0	181
Over 208 and up to 260	0	0	0	0	25	18	16	14	14	13	11	16	2	129
Over 260	0	0	0	0	17	33	25	26	20	18	27	40	0	206
Grand totals Males	43	107	119	127	603	378	299	236	188	180	229	297	49	2,855

Females

Duration of Unemployment in weeks	*Under 17*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20-24*	*25-29*	*30-34*	*35-39*	*40-44*	*45-49*	*50-54*	*55-59*	*60 and over*	*Total*
One or less	6	7	4	4	13	9	7	4	4	1	2	1	0	62
Over 1 and up to 2	0	2	3	2	8	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	20
Over 2 and up to 4	2	0	7	5	24	14	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	60
Over 4 and up to 6	5	6	3	5	20	4	3	4	1	3	2	2	0	38
Over 6 and up to 8	1	1	1	6	20	15	3	4	2	4	4	1	0	62
Over 8 and up to 13	3	10	12	9	40	23	11	9	6	8	5	3	0	139
Over 13 and up to 26	10	21	33	25	88	51	19	20	12	11	15	15	0	329
Over 26 and up to 39	0	10	4	7	52	45	20	5	9	10	13	4	0	179
Over 39 and up to 52	0	5	5	7	37	40	14	12	2	7	8	8	0	145
Over 52 and up to 65	0	2	4	4	23	23	19	4	6	2	8	5	0	100
Over 65 and up to 78	0	2	9	5	13	15	4	2	4	1	3	5	0	63
Over 78 and up to 104	0	0	5	4	14	11	5	5	0	4	5	13	0	66
Over 104 and up to 156	0	0	0	5	18	13	3	5	7	6	3	14	0	74
Over 156 and up to 208	0	0	0	1	17	4	4	1	1	4	7	6	0	45
Over 208 and up to 260	0	0	0	0	8	3	2	0	3	3	4	9	0	32
Over 260	0	0	0	0	5	11	4	1	0	8	9	9	0	47
Grand totals Females	27	66	90	89	400	283	122	82	58	72	88	95	0	1,472

Textile and Clothing Industries

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Paymaster General what information he has concerning the number of people employed in the textiles and clothing industries in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will give comparable figures for each month in the last five years.

Mr. Lang: The Department's employment statistics for the textiles and clothing industries are produced on a quarterly basis and cannot be expressed in precisely the manner required.

The latest available figures for employees in employment in the textiles (including man-made fibres) and clothing industries in Great Britain during the last five years are as follows:

	Number
1980	
December	585,000
1981	
March	565,000
June	550,000
September	544,000
December	532,000
1982	
March	521,000
June	510,000
September	501,000
December	491,000
1983	
March	481,000
June	475,000
September	478,000
December	475,000
1984	
March	470,000
June	467,000
September	467,000
December	465,000
1985	
March	460,000
June	459,000
September	464,000

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Rooker asked the Paymaster General if, pursuant to his reply of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *326*, he will publish the latest figures for the ethnic origins of trainees recruited to the YTS by the construction industry training board, indicating what percentage each is of the total.

Mr. Trippier: The Manpower Services Commission is currently considering the extent to which information provided by managing agents and sponsors on the ethnic group of trainees on YTS can be made available. I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as I am in a position to do so.

ENERGY

NATO

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state the post, rank and responsibilities of the official who represents the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation petroleum planning committee; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The post is section head, oil contingency planning, which has the rank of grade 7. The committee meets twice a year in Brussels.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Objectives

Mr. Soames asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement outlining the objectives of Her Majesty's Government for the rest of the current Parliament.

The Prime Minister: The heart of our strategy is the continued reduction in inflation as a basis for sustained economic growth, built on sound financial foundations. Our aim is to hold public expenditure broadly constant in real terms and to reduce Government borrowing and the proportion of national income taken by taxation. We will continue to pursue measures to encourage initiative and enterprise. We shall remove barriers to effective competition and to the better working of markets. We shall seek to improve incentives. We shall continue to encourage the small business sector. We shall continue to pursue further measures of privatisation in order to improve the efficiency of the industries concerned and to encourage wider share ownership. It is only by pursuing these policies that we shall secure the continued substantial growth in new jobs which has occurred since 1983.

We shall continue to uphold the rule of law. We shall pursue our proposals to tighten up the law on public order and to counter the evil traffic in drugs. We shall take all necessary action to deal with fraud. We shall introduce a comprehensive framework for the supervision of the rapidly changing financial sector.

We shall continue to encourage wider home ownership. We shall implement major reforms in the social security system. We shall continue to protect retirement pensions and linked long-term benefits against inflation. We shall also develop our proposals for a radical recasting of the system of local government finance and the eventual abolition of the domestic rate. We shall be publishing a Green Paper on the reform of personal taxation. We shall continue to seek ways of improving the educational system through the extension of parental choice and through the improvement of standards in the system. We shall continue to develop the NHS to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service to patients. We will continue to improve the efficiency of the public services, taking Government out of those areas which are best left to others. In Northern Ireland, we shall continue to develop and build upon the Anglo-Irish agreement signed in November. We shall remain ready to listen to and consider the views of all constitutional politicians.

We shall continue to play a full and active part in the NATO alliance as the best means of preserving the peace. We shall also play a full part in the further development of the European Community.

We are well on course, but there is much left to do. I am fully confident that we will carry forward our policies to a lasting and successful conclusion.

Westland plc (Disciplinary Proceedings)

Q42. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if any disciplinary action is to be taken against *(a)* Mr. Bernard Ingham, *(b)* Mr. Charles Powell and *(c)* Ms. Colette Bowe in relation to their conduct during the Westland affair; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 31 January, at columns 639-40.

Engagements

Mr. Haynes asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

Mr. Marlow asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

THE ARTS

Local Government Reform

Mr. Alton asked the Minister for the Arts if, in the light of the breakdown of negotiations between the successor authorities to the Merseyside metropolitan council, he will make a statement on the future of Liverpool Empire theatre and the Royal Liverpool philharmonic hall.

Mr. Luce: Negotiations about the Philharmonic Hall are continuing between the Arts Council and successor authorities. The Arts Council is discussing ways in which the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra can be so funded that it can pay an economic rent for its use of the hall. The Arts Council hopes that, with the co-operation of the successor authorities, this will enable the funding of the hall intself to be maintained.

The tenancy of the Empire theatre is to be taken over by a major leisure group and its immediate future is not in doubt.

National Maritime Museum

5. **Mr. Faulds** asked the Minister for the Arts what information he has on the number of visitors to the National Maritime museum who made payments for admission during the year ended 31 December 1985.

Mr. Luce: The number of visitors who paid for admission to the National Maritime museum main building or the Old Royal Observatory or both during 1985 is estimated at 453,237. This figure is based on an analysis of tickets sold, using the following conventions:

i. each family ticket sold represents four visitors;
ii. each local resident's annual ticket sold represents one visitor;
iii. each school's annual ticket sold represents 30 visitors;
iv. each of the 229,516 combined tickets sold, giving admission to the main building and the observatory, is counted as one visitor only.

In addition, it is estimated that there were around 147,000 non-paying repeat visits and free admissions during 1985.

I understand also that, for the nine months in 1984 during which admission charges operated (1 April to 31 December), the number of paying visitors estimated on the above conventions was 361,840. The corresponding figure for the same nine months in 1985 was 401,135, representing an increase of some 11 per cent.

Merseyside (Trustee Body)

Mr. Thornton asked the Minister for the Arts whether he is in a position to announce the creation and composition of the new national trustee body for Merseyside to be established under section 46 of the Local Government Act 1985.

Mr. Luce: Yesterday Her Majesty in Council was pleased to approve the order to establish the board of trustees for the national museums and galleries on Merseyside. The order has today been laid before both Houses of Parliament and will come into effect on 20 February. I have appointed to date 13 trustees, with Sir Leslie Young, CBE, DL as chairman. The other trustees are the Duke of Westminster, Mr. Nicholas Barber, Professor Robert Berry, Professor Anthony Bradshaw, Mr. George Holt, Professor Michael Kauffman, Councillor John Last, Mr. Brian Redhead, Councillor Benjamin Shaw, Mr. Garry Thomson, Lady Marina Vaizey and Sir David Wilson. Further appointments will be made in due course.

Cash Limits

Mr. Soames asked the Minister for the Arts if he intends to change any of the cash limits for which he is responsible.

Mr. Luce: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring Supplementary Estimate, I propose to increase the 1985-86 cash limit on class V, vote 10, (Arts, the Arts Council and other institutions, the National Heritage and the Government Arts Collection) by £520,000 from £129,677,000 to £130,197,000. The increase is required in respect of items being accepted in lieu of tax, in accordance with my predecessor's statement to Parliament on 26 July 1985. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planning total of public expenditure.

South Bank

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister for the Arts if he was consulted over the salaries being offered for the Arts Council's new posts of director of arts co-ordination, controller of marketing and resources, controller of touring and controller of planning.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *380*]: Yes. The Arts Council consulted my office about these posts and I have been kept informed of developments.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Graduates (Earnings)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has available to him about the earnings of those with postgraduate qualifications immediately after acquiring the qualification as compared with the earnings of those with first degrees.

Mr. Walden: Detailed information on the earnings of first degree and higher degree graduates immediately after graduation is not available. Data from the general household survey over the period 1979 to 1983 suggests that men with higher degrees aged 25 to 29 earned some 3 per cent. more than those with first degrees of the same age. Numbers in this sample survey are insufficient to quote reliable estimates for actual earnings. Similar figures for women would not be reliable because of small sample numbers and the effect of part-time working.

Gordon Secondary School, Kent

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will publish his decision about the prospective closure of Gordon secondary schools in Gravesend, Kent.

Sir Keith Joseph: I expect to announce my decision on this proposal soon.

Teachers (Wolverhampton)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers employed in secondary schools covered by the Wolverhampton education authority have left their posts during the last seven years; and if he will list the average pupil-teacher ratios in secondary schools in that area in each year during the same period.

Mr. Dunn: The numbers of teachers who left secondary schools in Wolverhampton are not readily available from central records. The pupil-teacher ratios in the secondary sector over the past seven years were as follows:

Pupil-teacher ratio within maintained secondary schools in Wolverhampton

January of each year	*Pupil-teacher ratio*
1979	15·6
1980	15·6
1981	15·0
1982	15·2
1983	15·2
1984	14·8
1985	14·9

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Falkland Islands

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list costs per head of health service provision in the Falkland Islands in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: In the financial year ended 30 June 1984, the latest period for which figures are available, costs of health service provision in the Falklands were approximately £134 per head.

Gulf of Sirte

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Libya's claims over the Gulf of Sirte; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We, in common with our EC partners, take the view that the Libyan claim to sovereignty over the whole of the waters of the Gulf of Sirte is contrary to international law. In a Note delivered to the Libyan authorities on behalf of the member states of the European Community on 24 September 1985 the presidency made this clear following recent Libyan regulations on merchant shipping.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics (Strathclyde)

Mr. Allen Adams asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many registered unemployed there were in Strathclyde in January;

(2) how many job vacancies there were in jobcentres in Strathclyde in January.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is available in the Library.

Teachers (Dispute)

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his meeting with Church leaders on 10 February about finding a solution to the teachers' dispute.

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what specific proposals were discussed with representatives of Scottish churches on Monday 10 February relating to the current teachers' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. and learned Friend had a useful exchange of views with representatives of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church on 10 February. He emphasised that any final package had to deal with teachers' duties and conditions of service as well as pay. He would not lay down preconditions for the outcome of the negotiations and recognised that a balance had to be struck between the aspirations of both sides if an early end to the dispute was to be found. He noted that the employers and the majority of the teachers' unions in England and Wales had been able to reach agreement on the basis of Government resources that were equally available to teachers in Scotland; and he expressed the hope that negotiations between teachers and employers would now begin on the basis of the resources available.

College Closures and Mergers

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if, following the publication of the report of the Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council, he will give estimated figures to show the saving which would result

if the Scottish Tertiary Education Advisory Council's recommendation to close further colleges of education in Scotland was implemented.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Since the report makes no specific recommendation as to which colleges might close, it does not provide any basis for estimating prospective savings.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will specify what savings were made by closing *(a)* Callender Park college of education, *(b)* Hamilton college of education and by the merger of Notre Dame and Craiglockhart colleges into one college.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Farmers (Financial Assistance)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the time scale of the payment of weather aid and hill livestock compensatory allowance remains as indicated in November 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Yes. Payment of weather aid commenced on 20 December and by tomorrow £6·6 million will have been paid out to 18,300 applicants. Hill livestock compensatory allowance payments commenced on 27 January, one month earlier than in 1985. By tomorrow, £15 million will have been paid out to 7,350 applicants.

In addition, £7·2 million was paid out in sheep annual premium to 15,000 applicants on 17 December.

Payments on such a scale in under nine weeks represent a very considerable achievement by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, on which I commend it.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the special weather and enhanced hill livestock compensatory allowance announced in 1985 take account of the supplement introduced in 1984 which was payable to farmers in the Highlands and Islands Development Board areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Following the announcement of new hill livestock compensatory allowances (HLCAs) for 1986, revised Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) supplements were announced on 19 December 1985, at columnn 294, by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Scotland. Adverse weather aid payments are entirely unrelated to HLCAs and the rates of payment are the same within and outwith the HIDB area.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the real overall value of the special weather aid and enhanced hill livestock compensatory allowance announced in 1985 after taking account of delays in payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State announced on 28 November that the estimated value of the adverse weather aid in Scotland was £7·7 million; and that the increase in hill livestock compensatory allowances would be worth about £5 million in a full year, bringing the total value of these allowances to over £43 million. He undertook to make the weather aid payments speedily and to make an initial payment of 75 per cent. of the HLCA as soon as possible after receipt of the claims, the balance being paid after checking.

Payment of the adverse weather aid commenced on 20 December and by tomorrow £6·6 million will have been paid out to 18,300 applicants. HLCA payments commenced on 27 January, one month earlier than in 1985. By tomorrow, £15 million will have been paid out to 7,350 applicants.

The estimated value of the aid and the HLCAs to Scottish farmers remains as announced.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the National Farmers Union of Scotland on weather aid and hill livestock compensatory payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The National Farmers Union has made representations alleging delay in making these payments. I do not accept these criticisms. Payments are being made in accordance with the announcement by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State on 28 November. I have directed the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to treat those payments as a matter of urgency. I am very satisfied with the progress to date and I have every confidence that it will continue.

Macaulay Institute for Soil Research

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the names of organisations and individuals who have made representations to him against the proposal to transfer the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research from Aberdeen.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State will write to my hon. Friend supplying the information and will place a copy of his letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will be in a position to announce his decision on the proposed transfer of the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research from Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: As my hon. Friend is aware, no decision on the location of the new Macaulay institute will be taken until the results of a feasibility study are available. The study is under way and all concerned have been made aware of the need for urgency. It is not possible at this time to state a date on which a decision will be announced.

Mr. Bill Walker asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the report of the feasibility study into the changes proposed at the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research will be made publicly available.

Mr. Rifkind: The report will be made available to interested parties.

List D Schools

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children each island and regional council had in list D schools on 31 March 1985.

Mr. John MacKay: The information is set out in the table:

Regional/Island Council	Children in List D schools on 31 March 1985
Borders	4
Central	29
Dumfries and Galloway	1
Fife	35
Grampian	35
Highland	10
Lothian	58
Strathclyde	449
Tayside	44
Orkney	0
Shetland	0
Western Isles	0
	Total 665

WALES

Research and Development

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the gross and per capita expenditure on research and development sponsored by the Welsh Office at *(a)* universities and colleges in Wales and *(b)* Welsh industries between 1975 and 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information in the precise form and for the full period requested is not readily available. Expenditure on research and development commissioned by the Welsh Office is given in the following table:

£'000

	Total	Expenditure on R & D in United Kingdom Industry	Expenditure on R & D in United Kingdom Universities and Further Education Establishments
1980-81	825	162	282
1981-82	1,628	154	262
1982-83	1,545	195	292
1983-84	1,587	18	616

Source: Department of Trade and Industry.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he is satisfied with the progress being made in each of the counties in Wales in developing a community based service for children under 16 years of age currently in mental handicap hospitals; whether he intends to review progress in this field in the light of the All Wales Strategy for mentally handicapped people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have recently called for reports on progress in developing community based services for children in this category from all county planning teams implementing the all Wales strategy for mentally handicapped people; and we shall consider whether any further guidance is necessary when these are received.

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that all statements currently being prepared by health authorities in Wales, consequent to Welsh health circular WHC(85)46, on their plans regarding provision for mentally handicapped people and the future of mental handicap hospitals, will be developed as an integral part of the county social services plans for implementing his all-Wales strategy for mentally handicapped people.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend's policy already encourages local authorities and health authorities to work together in planning to meet the needs of mentally handicapped people. This is reflected not only in the all Wales strategy and the preparation of county plans but also in the requirements for statements under Welsh health circular WHC(85)46.

Schoolchildren (Statistics)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to the number of children of school age in each county in Wales who are not currently being educated at an approved educational institution; what information he has as to the proportion in each case accounted for by the children of travelling people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The number of pupils receiving education other than at school, as at January 1985, were as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	131
Dyfed	25
Gwent	273
Gwynedd	17
Mid Glamorgan	133
Powys	3
South Glamorgan	19
West Glamorgan	34

These figures relate to pupils receiving education in the local authority areas under arrangements made by the authorities; they include those educated at home, at hospital (excluding hospital special schools) and at other groups (for example, assessment centres and community homes).

Information on the number of children of travelling people receiving education, either at school or otherwise, is not centrally available.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from bodies representing industry, local government, religious organisations, voluntary bodies or private individuals concerning the Government's proposals to abolish restrictions on Sunday trading in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Since publication of the Shops Bill on 15 November 1985 I have received 36 representations from religious organisations, 39 from private individuals and one from a shopkeeper, together with two petitions signed by 76 and 33 individuals, respectively. I have received no representations from industry, local government or voluntary bodies.

Mr. Ray Powell asked the Secretary of State for Wales on what aspects of the Government's proposals for abolition of restrictions on Sunday trading he answers parliamentary questions as they affect Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Sunday trading is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I answer questions only on the number of representations which are sent to me or my Department.

Welsh Water Authority

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take immediate steps to write off the capital debt of the Welsh water authority, with effect for the financial year 1986-87.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate from paragraphs 100 and 102 of "Privatisation of the Water Authorities in England and Wales" (Cmnd. 9734) that my right hon. Friend will be discussing with the Welsh water authority the appropriate restructuring of its balance sheet.

Teacher Training College, Bangor

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of the teacher training college at Bangor.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I am awaiting the advice of the Wales advisory board on local authority higher education.

Police Authorities

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any plans to increase rate support grant for police authorities in the coming financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Following my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's decision to increase the rate of police specific grant to 51 per cent., I have decided to increase block grant for Welsh authorities by £1 million for 1986-87. Aggregate Exchequer grant in Wales will then increase by about £2·5 million. This recognises the priority which the Government give to improving the policing of our country. All police authorities in Wales will gain grant, as shown in the following table, and no district authority will lose grant. Ratepayers throughout Wales will therefore benefit from the increase in grant.

Effects of increasing police specific grants

£000

Authority	*Increase in specific grant*	*Increase in block grant*	*Total*
Clwyd	176	183	359
Dyfed	145	57	202
Gwent	211	203	414
Gwynedd	108	56	164
Mid Glamorgan	290	115	405
Powys	48	27	75
South Glamorgan	214	185	399
West Glamorgan	196	174	370

Note: The figures assume gross spending remains at the level assumed for the 1986-87 settlement, that is, that the increase in specific grant is accompanied by a reduction in expenditure for block grant purposes. Total block grant is assumed to rise by £1 million.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reform

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he expects the Local Government Reorganisation (Staff Transfer) Order 1986 to be made.

Mr. Tracey: The Local Government Reorganisation (Designation of Staff) Order 1986 as made on 7 February and was laid before Parliament today. It designates approximately 120,000 staff of the GLC and metropolitan counties for transfer, on their existing terms and conditions, to successor authorities—mainly ILEA and the joint authorities for police and fire and civil defence. My right hon. Friend expects to make a supplementary order at the end of this month; and all successor authorities have been invited to submit requests for any further staff they wish to be transferred to them.

The future is now clear for these staff and the Government look to successor authorities to make their further decisions on recruitment as soon as possible.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to date of the Mount Pleasant airport at Port Stanley.

Sir George Young: The estimated total costs of the RAF and separate Army works at Mount Pleasant airport remain unchanged from those I gave to the hon. Member in my reply to a previous question from him on 30 October 1985, at column 525.

Bathing Beaches

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance his Department has given recently to local authorities about monitoring the quality standards of public bathing beaches set by the EEC.

Mrs. Rumbold: The survey announced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) on 18 December 1985, at column 223, will be carried out by water authorities in consultation with local authorities. Our officials wrote to water authorities on 18 December 1985 and on 31 January 1986 setting out the practical details of the survey and stressing that water quality was to be assessed against the standards set in the EEC "bathing water" directive (76/160/EEC).

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his Department's proposed study of the quality of bathing beaches in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: The survey will be completed in the autumn of 1987 and a report will then be prepared for publication.

Council House Building

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of council house building in (1) England and Wales and (2) Scotland was represented by *(a)* direct labour departments of councils and *(b)* private construction companies, for each of the years 1979 to 1984.

Sir George Young: The estimated percentages based on the returns to the Department which give the value of new public sector house building put in place in each year are as follows:

(Percentages)

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
England and Wales						
Private contractors	. .	. .	93	94	94	96
Direct labour departments	. .	. .	7	6	6	4
Scotland						
Private contractors	. .	. .	99	98	99	98
Direct labour departments	. .	. .	1	2	1	2
Great Britain						
Private contractors	94	94	94	94	95	96
Direct labour departments	6	6	6	6	5	4

Separate figures are not available for the individual countries in 1979 and 1980.

London Country Bus Service

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received an application from the Greater London council for his consent to a grant to the London Country bus services minibus service; what consideration he has given to the matter; and when he expects to give his consent.

Mr. Tracey: No such application has been received from the GLC.

Kenwood House

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors he took into account in proposing the transfer to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission of some 112 acres surrounding Kenwood house; and what consultations were held with the boroughs of Haringey, Barnet and Camden.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend took into account the provisions of section 44 of the Local Government Act 1985, which themselves secure the transfer of some 68 acres of land, together with Kenwood house, to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission; the effective future management and presentation of Kenwood house and its environs; and the public's enjoyment of both the house and its setting. There have been no detailed consultations with the boroughs of Haringey, Barnet and Camden about the total extent of land to be transferred to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission.

Building Regulations

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce new building regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: New building regulations came into force last November. Following the policy outlined in the White Paper "Lifting the Burden" (Cmnd. 9571) the requirement of the regulations are now being reviewed further. The aim is that the regulations should be reduced to the minimum required to secure their essential function, which is the preservation of public health and safety. The regulations also have a role in setting basic standards of cost-effective energy conservation. A consultative document will be issued later this year.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current United Kingdom building regulations in respect of the thickness of glass required in (i) internal panelling, (ii) internal doors, (iii) internal windows and (iv) windows with an external face; and what information he has as to the comparable requirements in *(a)* Norway, *(b)* Sweden, *(c)* Finland, *(d)* Denmark, *(e)* West Germany, *(f)* the Netherlands, *(g)* Belgium, *(h)* Luxembourg, *(i)* France, *(j)* Switzerland, *(k)* Austria, *(l)* Italy and *(m)* Spain.

Sir George Young: There are no specific requirements governing the thickness of glass in the regulations in England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. I am not aware of such requirements in the other countries referred to by the hon. Member.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are the current United Kingdom building regulations regarding roof insulation standards; and what information he has as to how these compare with *(a)* Denmark, *(b)* Sweden, *(c)* Finland, *(d)* Norway, *(e)* West Germany, *(f)* Austria and *(g)* France, respectively;

(2) what are the current United Kingdom building regulations regarding wall insulation standards; and what information he has as to how these compare with *(a)* Norway, *(b)* Finland, *(c)* Sweden, *(d)* Denmark, *(e)* France and *(f)* West Germany, respectively;

(3) what are the current United Kingdom building regulations regarding floor insulation standards; and what information he has as to how these compare with *(a)* Finland, *(b)* Norway, *(c)* Denmark, *(d)* Sweden, *(e)* West Germany, *(f)* Austria, *(g)* Eire, *(h)* the Netherlands, *(i)* Switzerland, *(j)* France, *(k)* Spain and *(l)* Greece, respectively.

Sir George Young: I shall answer these questions shortly.

Women's Cricket Association

Mr. John Carlisle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he or officials of his Department have offered advice to the Women's Cricket Association concerning the visit to South Africa by certain individual members of that association.

Mr. Tracey: No.

Greater London Enterprise Board

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *424*, what efforts he has made to obtain consent to reveal the name of the company.

Mr. Tracey: My officials wrote to the company concerned on 12 August 1985 requesting its permission to reveal its name.

GLC (Grants)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent to a grant to the Haringey women's training and educational centre for which the Greater London council applied on 20 November 1985;

(2) when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London Council's application for consent to a grant to London Country Bus Services riverbus service.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on Tuesday 21 January at column *141*.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to have completed his consideration of the Greater London council's application for consent for a grant to the Chelsea social club.

Mr. Tracey: No such application has been received from the GLC. An application by the GLC to make a grant to the Chelsea social council was refused on 6 February.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on a possible review of the limit on spending under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received representations on this matter from a number of local government bodies, including local authority associations, individual local authorities and some other interested organisations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Martina Anderson

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what treatment Martina Anderson currently in Her Majesty's prison, Brixton, is receiving for her migraine condition.

Mr. Mellor: Ms. Anderson is receiving appropriate treatment under the care of the medical staff at Brixton.

Theft Prevention

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about which police forces encourage post code marking of articles as an aid to prevent theft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Details of all crime prevention implemented by police forces in England and Wales are not held centrally. We know, however, that many forces have introduced property marking schemes often as part of a neighbourhood watch package. In June 1984 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary issued guidelines on property marking to all chief officers of police in England and Wales as an aid to forces about to launch schemes. The guidelines referred to the results of a property marking project in South Wales launched in November 1983 and carried out by the Home Office crime prevention unit in conjunction with South Wales constabulary. They showed a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of domestic burglaries in the project area during the one-year evaluation period. This successful project continues.

Durham (Car Accidents)

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Durham as to how many car accidents there have been in the County Durham police area involving police vehicles in the last five years resulting in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury; and what is the total number of people who have died as a result.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested is available only for the years from 1982 onwards. This information, together with figures for the number of people seriously or slightly injured, is given in the table:

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986**
Accidents involving police vehicles resulting in death	0	0	0	0	0
Accidents involving police vehicles resulting in injury	17	16	22	20	3
Number of people seriously injured	3	3	5	1	1
Number of people slightly injured	17	17	24	23	3

* To 7 February.

Rape

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of rape offences reported to the police in 1982, 1983, 1984, and 1985, respectively, by police force area; and if he will also list the number of offences that have been cleared up.

Mr. Mellor: The available information is on the number of rapes recorded by each police force and is published annually in "Criminal Statistics Supplementary Tables" (volume 3, table S.3.1 of the issue for 1984). Figures for 1985 are not yet available. For the clear-up rates I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk) on 16 January 1986, at column 262.

Police Complaints Authority (Report)

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the report of the Police Complaints Authority will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. Friend expects to receive from the Police Complaints Authority a report on the discharge of its function during 1985 by the end of March. He will arrange for it to be laid before Parliament as soon as possible thereafter.

South Yorkshire Fire Service

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the South Yorkshire fire service is under

strength; what recruitment will be required to reach the necessary establishment; and if such recruitment will be possible after 1 April;

(2) if he is satisfied that the South Yorkshire fire service will be able to maintain services which are up to national standards, to man appliances to the same standards and to ensure that fire appliances will be available as required at all times from 1 April.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The latest information available to me about the notified establishment (uniformed including control staff) of the South Yorkshire fire service was 1,218 whole-time posts at 1 January 1985, against which there were 94 vacancies at the end of 1985. The retained (that is part-time) establishment was 236, and there were 121 vacancies. Under paragraph 4 of the Fire and Civil Defence Authorities (Establishment, Support Services and Management Schemes) Regulations 1985 the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority will be consulted shortly about its establishment scheme for 1986-87, including its plans for recruitment.

The maximum precept for 1986-87 prescribed in accordance with section 4(1) of the Rates Act 1984 should enable the authority broadly to maintain the existing levels of service. We expect it to meet the nationally recommended standards through efficient use of the available resources.

West Yorkshire Police Authority

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources Her Majesty's Government are making available to the West Yorkshire police authority in 1986-87 compared with 1985-86.

Mr. Giles Shaw: If the West Yorkshire police authority's expenditure, including police grant, in 1986-87 is £126 million, the level currently implied by the maximum precept contained in the Local Government Act 1985 (Police and Fire and Civil Defence Authorities) Precepts Limitation Order 1986 which was approved by Parliament on 11 February, 51 per cent. of its expenditure will be met by the Home Office through police grant and the authority will also receive some £20 million in block grant. Thus in 1986-87, 67 per cent. of the authority's expenditure will be financed by central Government. 50 per cent. of the expenditure of the present police authority in 1985-86 is being met through police grant. It is not possible to say to what extent the authority's expenditure in 1985-86 is financed by block grant, which is paid in support of the county council's services generally.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the West Yorkshire police authority on the maintenance of an effective and efficient police force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on 3 February, at column 2. The House has now approved the order setting a maximum precept for the West Yorkshire police authority. This maximum will allow the authority to spend at a level sufficient to fulfil its statutory duty to maintain an adequate and efficient force for its area. We look to the authority to budget at this level. By virtue of my right hon. Friend's announcement on 11 February of his intention to increase the level of police grant from 50 per cent. to 51 per cent. in 1986-87, the authority will be able to spend at the appropriate level while making a precept below the maximum he has set.

Firearms

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review police powers in relation to the control of firearms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I share the hon. Member's concern that firearms should be more properly controlled. The Firearms Act 1968 already lays down strict controls over the possession and use of firearms. Generally these work well and we are not persuaded that more stringent controls would have a significant effect on the level of armed crime. I shall, however, keep these issues under close review. Heavy penalties, up to life imprisonment in some instances, can already be imposed on those who use firearms for criminal purposes.

Prison Disciplinary Tribunal

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to introduce legislation establishing a prison disciplinary tribunal, as recommended by the report of the committee on the prison disciplinary system (Cmnd. 9641).

Mr. Mellor: As my right hon. Friend said when announcing the publication of the report of the committee on the prison disciplinary system on 30 October 1985, he accepts the need for new adjudication arrangements. The current position is that my right hon. Friend is considering in the light of the report what these arrangements should be. We hope that there will be an early opportunity for legislation.

NATO (Civil Defence Committee)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the post, rank and responsibilities of the official who represents the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation civil defence committee; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The United Kingdom is represented by the head of F6 Division (Emergency Planning). This is a grade 5 post. The NATO civil defence committee meets once a year alternately in Brussels or one of the member nations. There are several working groups which meet more frequently, usually in Brussels.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the expenditure by his Department in 1983 on combating illicit drug abuse.

Mr. Mellor: In the financial year 1983-84 the Home Office contributed £121,334 to international effort against drug misuse and provided £276,217 to projects for drug misusers under the aftercare accommodation scheme. It is not possible to quantify the specific contribution to action against drug misuse made by other Home Office expenditure, such as that on the police, but it would, of course, have been very considerable.

Police (Assault)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the chief constable of the West Midlands police as to the number of summonses wich have been issued against officers of their forces for alleged assault on private citizens and the number of cases in which each force has been required to pay compensation to the plaintiff;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the chief constable of the West Midlands police as to the number of assaults which have taken place on women police constables while undertaking patrol duties during the last two years; and in how many cases compensation was gained for injuries from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and list in the *Official Report* the names of all those Metropolitan police officers present in transit vans in the Holloway road area on the night of 6 August 1983 and subsequently investigated under Police Complaints Authority procedures following an assault upon five young people in Georges road, London N7, that night; and if he will indicate which police stations they were attached to at the time.

Mr. Hurd: I shall write to the hon. Member, but it is not the practice to publicise lists of possible suspects for a criminal offence, especially if such a list would confuse the innocent with the guilty.

Alcoholic Drinks (Under-age Persons)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands police as to the nature of his plans to send plain-clothes officers into public houses and to survey discotheques, off-licences and supermarkets for the purpose of detecting purchase or consumption of alcoholic drinks by under-age youngsters.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the chief constable of West Midlands police that the laws relating to under-age drinking are enforced as part of general police duties and that he has no plans for special arrangements.

Police Vans (Marking)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands police as to the extent of his plans to mark police vans with special numbers in line with the policy to be adopted by the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have noted the Commissioner's plans to mark certain vehicles to allow them to be identified more easily. We intend drawing this practice to the attention of the Association of Chief Police Officers so that they may consider whether it could be of assistance in other police areas.

Miss Hilda Murrell

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent reports he has received from the West Mercia police on the death of Miss Hilda Murrell.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Miss Murrell's death remains under investigation, but I understand from the chief constable of West Mercia that there has been no recent evidence likely to lead to the identification of an offender.

Rape Crisis Centres

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the number of rape crisis centres in England and Wales, and where, specifically, they are located.

Mr. Whitney: I have been asked to reply.

I understand there are currently 37 rape crisis centres in England and Wales. This Department provides some financial support for the London rape crisis centre at PO Box 69, London WC1X 9NJ, where details of the location of other centres are held.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Building Industry

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many private building contractors were declared bankrupt in Great Britain in 1975, 1980 and 1985 or the nearest available years.

Mr. Howard: The information that is available for insolvencies in the construction industry is given in the table:

	1975	*1980*	*1984*
Bankruptcies—England and Wales	1,543	783	901
Company Liquidations—Great Britain	995	1,030	1,913

There is no industry breakdown of sequestrations in Scotland — the equivalent of bankruptcies in England and Wales. The bankruptcy figures include receiving orders and administration orders; the total is the net number of cases administered after consolidations and rescissions.

Potato Crisps

Mr. Higgins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce a measure requiring packets of potato crisps to be marked with the weight of the contents.

Mr. Howard: Article 14(3)*(h)* of the Weights and Measures Act 1963 (Miscellaneous Foods) Order 1984 already requires packets of potato crisps (and other similar snack food products) weighing 1 oz (approximately 28·5g) or more to be marked with the net weight of the contents. From 1 July 1989 this lower limit is being reduced to 25g.

Clothing and Textiles

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the level of investment in the United Kingdom textile and clothing industries in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will give the comparable figures for each month in the last five years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information requested is not available on a monthly basis. Quarterly estimates at 1980 prices of the direct capital expenditure of the textiles, leather and clothing industries from 1981 to the third quarter of 1985 were published in table 3, page 554 of British Business, 13 December 1985.

Men's Suits (Romania)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to prevent the dumping of Romanian men's suits in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Clark: Imports into the United Kingdom of men's suits from Romania are subject to a quota, which is strictly enforced, under the provisions of the EC/ Romania bilateral textile agreement. This agreement also contains provisions for dealing with abnormally low price levels. We have drawn the attention of the European Commission to the prices at which Romanian suits have been entering the United Kingdom, and are considering appropriate action.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations his Department has made to the European Commission in relation to men's suits imported from Romania; and what action they proposed.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, in view of the recent availability of unemployment statistics broken down by ward, he will review the means used to determine the boundaries of assisted areas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Travel-to-work areas are the closest available approximation to self-contained labour markets covering the whole country and are the smallest units for which nationally comparable unemployment rates are available. As such we will continue to use them as the basis for designating assisted areas.

Leeds (Regional Aid)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will extend assisted area status to the Bramley and Wortley wards of Leeds.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have no plans to extend assisted area status to the Bramley and Wortley wards of Leeds.

Leyland Bus

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the Government have been approached by Hestair Dennis with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(2) if the Government have been approached by Mercedes-Benz with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(3) if the Government have been approached by Hino with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(4) if the Government have been approached by MAN with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(5) if the Government have been approached by Daf with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(6) if the Government have been approached by Scania with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(7) if the Government have been approached by Renault with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus;

(8) if the Government have been approached by Iveco with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No such approach has been made.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government have been approached by Volvo with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes; and the company is being invited to explain its interest with BL.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government have been approached by Ikarus with a view to conducting exploratory talks as to the future arrangements or ownership of Leyland Bus.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A representative of Ikarus has briefly discussed with my officials possible ventures in the United Kingdom, but ownership or any other form of merger with Leyland Bus was not discussed.

NATO (Committees)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will state the post, rank and responsibilities of the official who represents the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation industrial planning committee; how often this committee meets; and where it meets;

(2) if he will state the post, rank and responsibilities of the official who represents the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation civil communications planning committee; how often this committee meets; and where it meets;

(3) if he will state the names, posts and employers of the non-government officials who represent the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation civil communications planning committee.

Mr. Butcher: The United Kingdom is represented on the NATO industrial planning committee and civil communications planning committee by grade 7 officials responsible for defence planning in the Department. Non-Government representation on the civil communications planning committee is provided by a senior employee of British Telecommunications plc. The committees meet in plenary session twice annually, usually at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the grants-in-aid which have been made to companies in the tobacco industry since 1982.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Since 1982 no grant-in-aid has been made by the Department of Trade and Industry to companies in the tobacco industry. £5·5 million was paid to the tobacco industry under section 7 and section 8 of the Industrial Development Act in the period April 1979 to date.

Accident Statistics (Glass)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many accidents have been reported where injury has been caused by either (1) people falling through or (2) coming into contact with (i) glass doors, (ii) glass panelling and (iii) windows internal and external and the glass breaking, in whole or part, in the years 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 to the latest date available.

Mr. Howard: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

US-UK Investment

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give his estimate for each of the last five years of the value of United Kingdom *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* total investment in the United States of America and the value of United States (i) manufacturing and (ii) total investment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Butcher: The latest available information, which excludes direct investment by oil companies, is published in *Business Monitor* MA4, 1983, (tables 3.3 and 4.3). Figures for 1984 will be published in the spring.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

NATO Food and Agriculture Planning Committee

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the post, rank and responsibilities of the official who represents the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation food and agriculture planning committee; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mrs. Fenner: The United Kingdom is represented on the NATO food and agriculture planning committee by a grade 7 official who is head of the branch of emergencies division responsible for overall civil defence planning policy for food, agriculture and fisheries. The committee meets twice a year, normally in Brussels, at NATO headquarters.

Small Scale Energy Developments

Mr. Speller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to publicise the availability to farmers of grants for small scale energy developments under the Agricultural Improvement Regulations 1985.

Mrs. Fenner: I have already taken steps to publicise the grants available for investments in energy-saving facilities.

In October 1985 my Department published an advisory leaflet (AIS4) on farm environment and energy-saving grants which has been made available at all the Departments' local offices. The leaflet deals comprehensively with grants for small-scale energy developments under the national and EC funded elements of the agriculture improvement scheme.

Additional publicity has been given in the national and local press and at farming conferences and agricultural shows.

Food Labelling

Mr. Hickmet asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is yet in a position to make an announcement about proposals for legislation on the labelling of foods with their fat content.

Mrs. Fenner: Draft proposals for legislation on the labelling of foods with their total and saturated fat contents are today being circulated for comment to organisations representative of interests which will be substantially affected by them, as required under the Food Act 1984. The proposals represent an important stage in the fulfilment of the Government's intention to implement the recommendations made in the COMA report on diet and cardiovascular disease. Comprehensive labelling of food with its fat content will enable consumers to bring their consumption of fat into line with the best medical advice available whilst still choosing a balanced and attractive diet.

Revised proposals for voluntary full nutritional labelling of food are being circulated for comment at the same time.

I have arranged for copies of both documents to be placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Armed Forces (Crime Statistics)

Mr. McGuire asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the armed forces convicted of crimes committed in Northern Ireland are presently serving their sentences there; how many have been transferred to serve their sentences in prisons in Great Britain; and what were the reasons for allowing them to transfer.

Mr. Scott: The information requested in the first part of the question is not available. During the 10 years ending 31 December 1985, 34 persons convicted of crimes committed when they were serving members of the armed forces were transferred to Great Britain to serve their sentences.

Any convicted prisoner in Northern Ireland can apply to serve his sentence in another part of the United Kingdom. Each application is considered on its own merits, in consultation with the prison authorities in the receiving country. Various factors are taken into account in reaching a decision, including where the prisoner normally resides, his family circumstances, his background, his behaviour in prison and his personal safety. These criteria apply to all applications.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total of grants in aid paid to the tobacco industry in Northern Ireland since 1980.

Dr. Boyson I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Ulster Constabulary

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes have been made in the operational and other procedures of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the terms of paragraph 8 of the joint communiqué of the third meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmetal Conference at the level of Heads of Government, Cmnd. 9657.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Allowances

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total amount paid out by his Department for *(a)* heating allowances, *(b)* laundry allowances and *(c)* special diet allowances in 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Newton: The information available is the yearly amount based on November 1983 rates and the number of claimants in receipt of the additions at December 1983, as follows:

	Amount £ million
a. Heating	416
b. Laundry	10
c. Special diet	56

It is regretted that similar information is not available for 1984 and 1985.

Maternity Units (Closure)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* all maternity units for which his approval for closure has been sought, and the dates when he expects to make his decision.

Mr. Whitney: At present there are two proposals with us for decision that concern maternity units in England. Northern regional health authority proposes change of use of Thorpe maternity hospital. Yorkshire regional health authority proposes complete closure of Wharfdale hospital and transfer of services to Leeds infirmary.

We shall let our decisions be known when we have given each proposal our full consideration.

Income Support

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what income support or other benefits a British citizen receives if he is without any form of income in (i) Eire, (ii) France, (iii) West Germany and (iv) Italy if he has been in the country *(a)* less than three months, *(b)* less than 6 months and *(c)* less than 12 months.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to the Department's publication, "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the Member States of the European Communities. Portugal and Spain (position at 1 January 1985)", a copy of which is in the Library. Section IX contains information on social assistance schemes in the European Community member states.

Striking Miners (Benefits)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many miners who were on strike during the period March 1984 to March 1985 were refused benefit in each week after 6 March 1985, when they sought to claim unemployment benefit or supplementary benefit, on the grounds that the strike was not yet over; and how many miners' families continued each week since 6 March 1985 to suffer a deduction of £16 a week from benefits for their wives and children.

Mr. Major: Information is not available about the number of miners who claimed unemployment or supplementary benefit after 6 March 1985 and who were refused benefit because the stoppage of work due to the trade dispute at their place of employment had not yet ended.

The following table shows the numbers of payments made each week from 6 March 1985 to 30 April 1985 (when weekly returns ceased) to miners for their dependants, and in which the £16 statutory deduction was made.

Week ending	*Number of payments made*
12 March 1985	4,665
19 March 1985	519
26 March 1985	169
2 April 1985	94
9 April 1985	23
16 April 1985	39
23 April 1985	19
30 April 1985	11

National Insurance Contributions

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the revenue effect of abolishing the upper ceiling on payments to the National Insurance Fund for employee contributions.

Mr. Major: If the upper earnings limit for employee's class 1 national insurance contributions were to be abolished in 1986-87, but the ceiling retained for the contracted-out rebate, the additional receipts to the national insurance fund that year would be £610 million. This would attract an extra £55 million of Treasury supplement.

These figures are based on the same assumptions as Cmnd. 9672—the report by the Government Actuary on the draft of the Social Security (Contributions, Re-rating) Order 1985.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the data collected from all the weather stations by the office of the Chief Adjudication Officer on temperatures over the past 14 days.

Mr. Newton: I understand that the office of the Chief Adjudication Officer does not intend to publish the data on temperatures which it collects from the Meteorological Office. Following revised guidance issued by the Chief Adjudication Officer on 6 December 1985, this information is no longer necessary to determine whether there has been a period of exceptionally severe weather in any particular area. It may only be used to supplement other locally available information if appropriate.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many local offices have requested permission to begin payments of exceptionally severe weather payments over the past 14 days.

Mr. Newton: Local offices are not required to seek such permission. Following revised guidance issued by the Chief Adjudication Officer on 6 December 1985, the decision whether there has been a period of exceptionally severe weather in any particular area is one for the local adjudication officer, in the light of local weather conditions.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many local offices have contacted the office of the Chief Adjudication Officer requesting data on temperature levels in their region.

Mr. Newton: I understand that about 20 local offices have contacted the office of the Chief Adjudication Officer to request data on temperature levels recorded by the Meteorological Office.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what sum he has budgeted for during the current year for exceptionally severe weather payments.

Mr. Newton: No estimate has been made of expenditure during the current year on single payments for additional fuel used during a period of exceptionally severe weather, since there is no means of forecasting whether, when of where adjudication officers may decide that such a period has occurred.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many exceptionally severe weather payments have been made so far in the current year; and if he will give a regional breakdown.

Mr. Newton: Information is not currently available centrally on whether any single payments in respect of extra fuel used during a period of exceptionally severe weather have been made in the present year.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will review his decision not to make severe weather payments to claimants who purchase their fuel in advance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: No such decision has been taken. Guidance on single payments to help with the cost of fuel purchased in advance, but used faster than expected because of a period of exceptionally severe weather, is contained in the circular issued by the Chief Adjudication Officer on 6 December 1985, a copy of which is in the Library.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will publish tables comparable to tables P5 and P6 of the technical annex to "Reform of Social Security", showing pension projections for widows on the assumption that their husbands die at the age of 60 years.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Girocheques (Delay)

Mr. Millan asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the reason for recent delays in issuing girocheques from his Department's computer centre at Livingston; and what steps are being taken to prevent further delays.

Mr. Major: The computer system at Livingston which deals with the assessment and payment of unemployment benefit (and the payment of supplementary benefit to unemployed claimants) is both large and complex. It deals with the payment of benefit in respect of just under 1·5 million unemployed people, issuing around 750,000 girocheques per week. The system has been in operation since 1977 and has provided a consistent and reliable service since that time.

During the week commencing 27 January there was an unprecedented fault in the system. This was detected immediately and, whilst no incorrect payments were issued, the time needed to restore the situation resulted in the delayed delivery of some 20,000 girocheques by two days, and 65,000 girocheques by one day. The balance of 658,000 girocheques due that week were delivered on time.

The particular fault has now been corrected and recurrence is not to be expected. I am bound to say, however, that some problems are inevitable in an undertaking of this dimension. When any fault does occur, all effort is then directed towards minimising the impact on claimants.

I am grateful for the wholehearted effort demonstrated by the computer centre staff to restore the service as quickly as possible and the patience and co-operation of local office staff.

Board and Lodging Payments

Mr. Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many payments, and to what value, have been made in Swansea by his Department without verification of entitlement to reimburse applicants in board and lodging accommodation for moneys illegally stopped from them; what is the nature of the evidence he has received that some of these payments may not have been justified; what was the authorisation for uncorroborated payment; how many similar payments and to what value have been made elsewhere in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Following the Court of Appeal judgment in the Cotton case, the Department took the required steps to ensure that any arrears of supplementary benefit due to claimants would be properly paid without unreasonable delay. In line with normal procedures, the instructions to local offices (circular S4/85, a copy of which is in the Library) required that arrears should be assessed in accordance with information supplied by claimants in their signed statements of claim, subject to further inquiries where this information was considered inaccurate or where the claims had ceased.

I understand that, after arrears payments in Swansea had begun, several landlords came forward and made statements to the effect that they had reduced their charges to claimants. This indicates that the claimants concerned had failed to fulfil their duty to notify the Department of their change of circumstances, either immediately after the change or when specifically reminded to do so in the notification about arrears. Further inquiries are continuing. I understand that the independent adjudication officer is currently looking at cases to determine the questions of overpayment, amounts involved and recovery. I am not aware of any reports of similar overpayments in other offices.

Smoking

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the total sums spent directly and indirectly by his Department on anti-cigarette smoking activities; and if he has any information concerning the amount spent by the tobacco industry for sales promotions for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: This year the Department has provided about £3·5 million for activities designated to discourage smoking. Information on media advertising expenditure by the tobacco industry is supplied to the Department regularly on a confidential basis. We also have available the results of a continuous survey, undertaken by a commercial organisation, of press advertising on tobacco products which in 1985 was of a gross value of £55·5 million.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost to the National Health Service of smoking related disease for the last year to a convenient date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The annual costs to the National Health Service of treating smoking-related diseases, including the cost of general practitioner consultations and out-patient attendances, is now estimated at around £370 million. Previous estimates were based on less full data.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of recorded deaths in 1983 from the drug abuse of heroin, methadone, morphine and opium; what is his estimate of the number of premature deaths in that year caused by cigarette smoking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The table shows the numbers of deaths registered in 1983 in England and Wales with an underlying cause of death stated as drug dependence on, or non-dependent abuse of, morphine-type drugs, which include heroin, methadone, opium, opium alkaloids and their derivatives, and synthetics with morphine-like effects.

Deaths from abuse of morphine-type drugs
England and Wales 1983

*ICD**	*Cause of death*	*Number of deaths*
304.0	Drug dependence: morphine-type	64
304.7	Drug dependence: morphine-type with other drugs	14
305.5	Non-dependent abuse of drugs: morphine-type	1

* International Classification of Diseases 9th revision.

The Royal College of Physicians in its report "Health or Smoking?" (1983) stated that "some 100,000 of our citizens are dying prematurely" from the effects of smoking. This is based on the assumption that abolition of the hazards from cigarette smoking would lead to a reduction in the mortality of smokers and thus an increase in their expectation of life.

Stanley Royd Hospital

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the reports which he receives from Wakefield district health authority on action taken since the publication of the inquiry into the outbreak of food poisoning at Stanley Royd hospital.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall consider what is appropriate in the light of the contents of the report.

Single Payments

Mr. Michie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the number and value of single payments of supplementary benefit in the four social security offices serving Sheffield taken together in each year since November 1980, showing separately figures for maternity expenses, funeral expenses and other single payments.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have the information that is available as soon as possible.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if any advice has been given by the Chief Supplementary Benefits Officer in respect of single payments for house repairs to owner occupiers living in houses designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Newton: Guidance on the interpretation of the law relating to supplementary benefit is given by the Chief Adjudication Officer. His guidance on single payments for essential housing repairs is in paragraphs 7296-7300 of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library. He has issued no general guidance concerning repairs in relation to the Housing Defects Act 1984, although it is possible that advice in individual cases may have been given to local adjudication officers.

Crown Immunity

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to obtain from health authorities information on the identity of those hospitals which the Institution of Environmental Health Officers has reported would have warranted prosecution under food hygiene legislation, were it not for Crown immunity; and if he will publish such information.

Mr. Hayhoe: No. All health authorities have been reminded that they are expected to meet the standards required by food hygiene legislation, and my right hon. Friend has announced that the Government will be bringing forward legislation to make health authorities subject to the provisions of the Food Act 1984. I will, however, continue to follow up all individual cases of alleged poor food hygiene standards in hospitals which are brought to my attention.

Pensions

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be (i) the gross and (ii) the net cost of paying to retirement pensioners currently in receipt of basic or supplementary pension an additional weekly pension of *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10 or *(c)* £15, less the sum of any additional pension, earnings or investment income accruing; and how many pensioners would no longer be entitled to supplementary pension as a result.

Mr. Major: I regret that the information requested is not available. Details are not held centrally about pensioners' earnings below the appropriate earnings limit, or about their investment income.

Abortions

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of women who applied for abortions in *(a)* York and *(b)* Newcastle had their applications granted in 1985; to what health or other factors he attributes the difference between the two figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. In 1984, abortions to women resident in these health districts were:

District Health Authorities of residence	*Total*	*Percentage in NHS*	*Percentage outside NHS*
York	487	19·9	80·1
Newcastle	697	91·4	8·6

It is for health authorities to decide the level of their provision for abortion in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Disability Premium

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of those disabled claimants currently receiving any additional payments he estimates will be worse off in the long-term when in receipt of the proposed disability premium.

Mr. Newton: I refer the right hon. Member to the technical annex published with the White Paper "Reform of Social Security: Programme of Action" (Cmnd. 9691), which includes tables illustrating the effect on claimants' underlying entitlement to benefit of the move to income support on the basis of the assumptions explained in pages 9 to 14. These compare the illustrative rates against information on claimant's present receipt of benefit, including additional requirements.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bellingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the cash limit for class XI, vote 3: "Miscellaneous Health Services and Personal Social Services, England", is being revised.

Mr. Hayhoe: Yes. The cash limit is being reduced by £4,759,000 in order to offset, in part, an increase which is being proposed in a spring Supplementary Estimate for the family practitioner and certain other demand-led services (class XI, vote 2).

Medical Education

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to present the Government's reply to the fifth report of the Social Services Committee, 1984-85 Session, on medical education.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Government's response is being published today (Cmnd. 9701).

Cancer

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many patients have been treated for malignant neoplasm and carcinoma of the cervix in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many of these patients were in the following age groups in each of those years: *(a)* under 24 years, *(b)* 24 to 40 years and *(c)* over 40 years.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 22 January 1986, c. *235*]: I am sorry I cannot give my hon. Friend all the information she seeks. Some of it is not available centrally. The available information is given in the tables.

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases, England and Wales

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*
Malignant Neoplasm of the Cervix Uteri					
Under 25	46	36	45	43	42
25-39	726	753	809	882	846
40 and over	3,100	3,090	3,109	3,099	3,021
All ages	3,872	3,879	3,963	4,024	3,909
Carcinoma in Situ of the Cervix Uteri					
Under 25	316	300	369	397	412
25-39	2,608	2,941	3,152	3,868	3,789
40 and over	1,010	1,053	1,179	1,303	1,226
All ages	3,934	4,294	4,700	5,568	5,427

Estimated numbers of discharges and deaths of in-patient cases, NHS hospitals, England

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Malignant Neoplasm of the Cervix Uteri					
Under 25	(80)	(80)	(60)	(80)	(90)
25-39	2,080	2,070	2,610	2,180	2,710
40 and over	8,260	8,550	8,700	8,530	8,460
All ages	10,420	10,700	11,370	10,790	11,260
Carcinoma in Situ of the Cervix Uteri					
Under 25	*240	*290	*300	320	280
25-39	*3,500	*3,460	*3,780	4,170	3,850
40 and over	*1,390	*1,470	*1,770	1,580	1,730
All ages	*5,130	*5,220	*5,850	6,070	5,860

* England and Wales.
Figures in brackes are based on small sample numbers and should be treated with caution.

Benefits

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will publish tables, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for each of a single wage married couple with two children aged four and six years and three children aged three, eight and 11 years, earning £60, £70, £80, £90, £100, £110, £120, £130, £140, £150, £160 and £170 *(a)* under the existing tax and benefit systems and *(b)* under the benefit system proposed in Cmnd. 9691, using the illustrative benefit figures in the technical annex;

(2) if he will publish figures, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model tables, comparing net weekly spending power for a lone mother with two children aged four and six years, under the existing tax and benefit systems and under the benefit system proposed in Cmnd. 9691, using the illustrative figures in the technical annex, and in each of the following circumstances: *(a)* not working, after one year on benefits, *(b)* earning £20 a week from part-time work, *(c)* earning £40 a week from part-time working and *(d)* working full-time and earning £60, £70, £80, £90, £100, £110 and £120 per week.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1986, c. *508*]: The information is in the tables. The assumptions are as follows:

(a) Current national insurance contribution rates are in force.
(b) The families are tenants and that rent is £16·50 a week, general rate £6·30 a week and water rate £1·65 a week.
(c) Fares to work for full-time workers are £5·95 a week or £3 a week for part-time.
(d) Under the existing system current benefit rates are in force.
(e) Under the system proposed in Cmnd. 9691 the illustrative benefit figures in the technical annex are used and a 20 per cent. rates contribution is made. Present rounding and minima rules have been applied.
(f) All other assumptions are as in the April 1985 tax/benefit model tables.

It should be noted that heads of two parent families with dependent children do not typically have weekly earnings of £100 or less. Only about 4 per cent. have earnings at these levels.

(A) Existing tax and benefit system
Married couple with 2 children aged 4 and 6

Earnings head	*Tax*	*NI*	*FIS*	*CHB*	*Rent*	*Rent rebate*	*(Water rates £1·65) Rates*	*Rate rebate*	*Fares to work*	*FWM/FSM*		*Net weekly spending power*
60	—	4·20	24·50	14·00	16·50	14·40	7·95	5·22	5·95	1·61	2·06	87·19
70	1·07	4·90	19·50	14·00	16·50	13·15	7·95	4·82	5·95	1·61	2·06	88·77
80	4·07	5·60	14·50	14·00	16·50	11·90	7·95	4·42	5·95	1·61	2·06	88·42
90	7·07	8·10	9·50	14·00	16·50	10·65	7·95	4·02	5·95	1·61	2·06	86·27
100	10·07	9·00	4·50	14·00	16·50	9·32	7·95	3·52	5·95	1·61	2·06	85·54
110	13·07	9·90	—	14·00	16·50	7·73	7·95	2·81	5·95	—	2·06	83·23
120	16·07	10·80	—	14·00	16·50	4·83	7·95	1·51	5·95	—	2·06	85·13
130	19·07	11·70	—	14·00	16·50	1·93	7·95	—	5·95	—	2·06	86·82
140	22·07	12·60	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	—	88·93
150	25·07	13·50	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	—	95·03
160	28·07	14·40	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	—	101·13
170	31·07	—	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	—	107·23

Married couple with 3 children aged 3, 8 and 11

Earnings head	*Tax*	*NI*	*FIS*	*CHB*	*Rent*	*Rent rebate*	*(Water rates £1·65) Rates*	*Rate rebate*	*Fares to work*	*FWM/FSM*		*New weekly spending power*
60	—	4·20	30·50	21·00	16·50	14·78	7·95	5·34	5·95	1·61	4·12	102·75
70	1·07	4·90	25·80	21·00	16·50	13·45	7·95	4·92	5·95	1·61	4·12	104·53
80	4·07	5·60	20·80	21·00	16·50	12·20	7·95	4·52	5·95	1·61	4·12	104·18
90	7·07	8·10	15·80	21·00	16·50	10·95	7·95	4·12	5·95	1·61	4·12	102·03
100	10·07	9·00	10·80	21·00	16·50	9·67	7·95	3·68	5·95	1·61	4·12	101·41
110	13·07	9·90	5·80	21·00	16·50	8·22	7·95	3·03	5·95	1·61	4·12	100·41
120	16·07	10·80	0·80	21·00	16·50	6·77	7·95	2·38	5·95	1·61	4·12	99·41
130	19·07	11·70	—	21·00	16·50	4·10	7·95	1·18	5·95	—	4·12	99·23
140	22·07	12·60	—	21·00	16·50	1·20	7·95	—	5·95	—	4·12	101·25
150	25·07	13·50	—	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	2·06	104·09
160	28·07	14·40	—	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	—	108·13
170	31·07	15·30	—	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	—	—	114·23

(B) Benefit system proposed in Cmnd. 9691 using the illustrative benefit figures in the technical annex
Married couple with 2 children aged 4 and 6

Earnings gross	*Tax*	*NI*	*FC*	*CHB*	*Rent*	*Rent rebate*	*Rates*	*Rates rebate*	*Fares to work*	*Net weekly spending power*
60	—	4·20	35·00	14·00	16·50	3·99	7·95	0·87	5·95	79·26
70	1·07	4·90	29·30	14·00	16·50	2·47	7·95	—	5·95	79·60
80	4·07	5·60	24·90	14·00	16·50	1·33	7·95	—	5·95	80·16
90	7·07	8·10	21·70	14·00	16·50	0·55	7·95	—	5·95	80·68
100	10·07	9·00	17·40	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	81·93
110	13·07	9·90	13·20	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	83·83
120	16·07	10·80	8·90	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	85·63

Earnings gross	Tax	NI	FC	CHB	Rent	Rent rebate	Rates	Rates rebate	Fares to work	Net weekly spending power
130	19·07	11·70	4·60	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	87·43
140	22·07	12·60	0·40	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	89·33
150	25·07	13·50	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	95·03
160	28·07	14·40	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	101·13
170	31·07	15·30	—	14·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	107·23

Married couple with 3 children aged 3, 8 and 11

Earnings gross	Tax	NI	FC	CHB	Rent	Rent rebate	Rates	Rates rebate	Fares to work	Net weekly spending power
60	—	4·20	45·30	21·00	16·50	2·67	7·95	—	5·95	94·37
70	1·07	4·90	39·60	21·00	16·50	1·15	7·95	—	5·95	95·35
80	4·07	5·60	35·20	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	96·13
90	7·07	8·10	32·00	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	97·43
100	10·07	9·00	27·70	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	99·23
110	13·07	9·90	23·50	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	101·13
120	16·07	10·80	19·20	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	102·93
130	19·07	11·70	14·90	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	104·73
140	22·07	12·60	10·70	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	106·63
150	25·07	13·50	6·40	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	108·43
160	28·07	14·40	2·10	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	110·23
170	31·07	15·30	—	21·00	16·50	—	7·95	—	5·95	114·23

Lone mother with 2 children aged 4 and 6
(a) not working—after 1 year on benefit

Supplementary Benefit	Rent	Rates	Housing Benefit	CHB	FWM	FSM	Net Weekly Spending Power
43·00	16·50	7·95	22·80	18·55	1·61	2·06	63·57

(b) working part-time—earning £20

Supplementary Benefit	Earnings	NI	Fares to Work	Rent	Rates	Housing Benefit	CHB	FWM	FSM	Net Weekly Spending Power
28·50*	20·00	Nil	3·00	16·50	7·95	22·80	18·55	1·61	2·06	66·07

* Assumes benefit in payments for less than 1 year.

(c) working part-time—earning £40

Supplementary Benefit	Earnings	NI	Fares to Work	Rent	Rates	Housing Benefit	CHB	FWM	FSM	Net Weekly Spending Power
12·00*	40·00	2·00	3·00	16·50	7·95	22·80	18·55	1·61	2·06	67·57

* Assumes benefit in payment for less than 1 year.

(d) working full-time

Earnings Head	Tax	NI	FIS	CHB	Rent	Rent Rebate	Rates	Rate Rebate	Fares to Work	FWM/FSM		Net Weekly Spending Power
60	—	4·20	24·50	18·55	16·50	13·26	7·95	4·86	5·95	1·61	2·06	90·24
70	1·07	4·90	19·50	18·55	16·5-	12·01	7·95	4·46	5·95	1·61	2·06	91·82
80	4·07	5·60	14·50	18·55	16·50	10·76	7·95	4·06	5·95	1·61	2·06	91·47
90	7·07	8·10	9·50	18·55	16·50	9·45	7·95	3·58	5·95	1·61	2·06	89·18
100	10·07	9·00	4·50	18·55	16·50	8·00	7·95	2·93	5·95	1·61	2·06	88·18
110	13·07	9·90	—	18·55	16·50	6·41	7·95	2·21	5·95	—	2·06	85·86
120	16·07	10·80	—	18·55	16·50	3·51	7·95	0·91	5·95	—	2·06	87·76

Lone mother with 2 children 4 and 6
(a) not working—after 1 year on benefit

Income support	*Child benefit*	*Rent*	*Rates*	*Housing benefit*	*Free school meals*	*Free welfare milk*	*Net weekly spending power*
*41·45	18·55	16·50	7·95	21·54	2·06	1·61	*60·76

*Plus transitional protection for existing claimants.

(b) working part-time—earning £20

Earnings	*Income support*	*Child benefit*	*Rent*	*Rates*	*Housing benefit*	*Fares to work*	*Free school meals*	*Free welfare milk*	*Net weekly spending power*
20·00	36·45	18·55	16·50	7·95	21·54	3·00	2·06	1·61	72·76

(c) working part-time—earning £40

Earnings	*Income support*	*National insurance*	*Child benefit*	*Rent*	*Rates*	*Housing benefit*	*Fares to work*	*Free school meals*	*Free welfare milk*	*Net weekly spending power*
40·00	18·45	2·00	18·55	16·50	7·95	21·54	3·00	2·06	1·61	72·76

(d) working full-time—(there is no entitlement to rent or rates rebate)

Earnings gross	*Tax*	*NI*	*FC*	*CHB*	*Rent*	*Rates*	*Fares to work*	*Net weekly spending power*
60	—	4·20	35·00	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	78·95
70	1·07	4·90	29·30	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	81·48
80	4·07	5·60	24·90	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	83·38
90	7·07	8·10	21·70	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	84·68
100	10·07	9·00	17·40	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	86·48
110	13·07	9·90	13·20	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	88·38
120	16·07	10·80	8·90	18·55	16·50	7·95	5·95	90·18

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure White Paper

2. **Dr. Godman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the public expenditure White Paper.

Mr. MacGregor: None specifically on the White Paper.

Small Businesses

16. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from small businesses as to the effect on their cash flow of having to account each quarter for 100 per cent. of their invoiced value added tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Of the order of 150 in the past year.

Charities

18. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the value added tax burden faced by charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Since April of last year my colleagues and I have received some 300 representations about the value added tax burden on charities. These have been carefully considered, but I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

19. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the nation's wealth is taken by the state currently; and how much was taken 30 years ago.

Mr. MacGregor: Total tax and national insurance contributions as a percentage of GDP at market prices are estimated to be 38·4 per cent. in 1985-86, as compared to 29·4 per cent. in 1955-56.

Share Ownership

20. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress in the increasing individual share ownership.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to my hon. Friend, the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley).

32. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence there is to show the change in the number of shareholders over the last six years.

Mr. Moore: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley).

45. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individual shareholders he now estimates there to be; what the increase has been since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley).

Mr. Thurnham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about encouraging wider share ownership and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The most effective representations have come from the millions of people who have bought shares in privatised companies and in the companies they work for.

Telex

21. **Mr. Churchill** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has of cases in which his Department or any organisations within his responsibility have fallen victim to fraudulent telex bills or deceptive invitations to take advertisements in international telex directories, originating from abroad; what action he proposes to take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I am glad to say that none of my right hon. Friend's Departments have paid out money on these bills. Several have received such bills, one of which has been referred to the fraud squad.

Oil Prices

22. **Mr. Cabom** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the recent impact of oil price changes on tax revenues.

Mr. Brooke: New forecasts of tax revenues will be published at Budget time.

33. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the recent fall in oil prices will reduce the Exchequer's revenue in the current financial year.

Mr. Moore: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 27 January at column 410.

36. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his current estimates of the effect on taxation revenues arising from the fluctuations in oil prices.

Mr. Moore: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Cabom).

42. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implications for economic growth of the recent fall in North sea oil prices.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend earlier today to the question from the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Exchange Rate

23. **Mr. Pendry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about Government policy towards the exchange rate.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The exchange rate is one of a number of factors which I take into account in assessing financial conditions.

Income Tax

24. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to reduce the tax burden on the low-paid.

Mr. Brooke: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

25. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about tax thresholds.

Mr. Brooke: We have received a wide range of representations on this subject.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total number of individuals who would be removed from income tax by the raising of personal income tax thresholds by 10 per cent. above the current rate of inflation; and if he will estimate the total loss in revenue which would accrue to the Exchequer from such a move.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1986, c. *185*]: About one million fewer individuals, including working wives, would pay tax in 1986-87 compared with an indexed income tax regime. The direct revenue cost compared with indexation would be about £2·1 billion in a full year at 1986-87 income levels.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total Exchequer revenue derived through income tax payments by self-employed persons in each of the last 15 years for which figures are available; what is this figure as a percentage of total income tax payments in each of those years; and what was the average per capita amount of income tax paid by self-employed persons in each of those years.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 February 1986, c. *427*]: Available estimates are as follows, based on the annual sample surveys of personal incomes. The table relates to single people and married couples whose main source of income (usually the largest source) is from self-employment; and the estimates are of liabilities to tax (including liabilities in respect of other sources of income) rather than payments of tax.

Single people and married couples whose main source of income is from self-employment

Year	Number (thousands)	Income tax liabilities: Total (£ billion)	Per tax unit (£)	As percentage of income tax liabilities of all single people and married couples
1979-80	1,760	2·2	1,250	9·6
1980-81	1,820	2·6	1,430	9·8
1981-82	1,840	3·1	1,690	10·2
1982-83	1,970	3·5	1,790	10·9
1983-84	2,100	*4·1	*1,940	*11·6

* These figures are not comparable with those for the earlier years since the information for income tax liabilities in 1983-84 has been collected before basic rate relief under MIRAS. Comparable figures are not available, but the figures in the second and third column would be lower than shown and that in the final column little changed.

European Monetary System

26. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the European Economic Community financial mechanism.

Mr. Brooke: The new EEC financial mechanism agreed at Fontainebleau is working effectively. The 1986 Community budget contains provision for a 1,400 million ecu (c £850 million) abtatement for the United Kingdom which is in respect of its excessive net contribution in 1985. The January and February VAT payments already made have each duly been abated by about £70 million. In addition, the United Kingdom has received the 1,000 mecu (£605 million) abatement agreed separately at Fontainebleau in respect of its excessive net contribution in 1984.

Inflation

27. **Mr. Portillo** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average level of inflation since June 1983.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Between June 1983 and December 1985 the annualised increase in the retail prices index was 5·1 per cent.

43. **Mr. Forth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the average rate of inflation for each Parliament since 1956, and for this Parliament to date.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The annualised rates of increase in the retail prices index between the relevant dates are as follows:

From		To		Per cent.
May	1955	September	1959	3·0
October	1959	September	1964	3·1
October	1964	March	1966	4·3
April	1966	May	1970	4·6
June	1970	February	1974	9·5
March	1974	September	1974	17·0
October	1974	April	1979	15·2
May	1979	May	1983	11·5
June	1983	December	1985	5·1

46. **Mr. Andrew McKay** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of inflation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Over the 12 months to December 1985, the retail prices index increased by 5·7 per cent.

61. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current United Kingdom levels of inflation compared with Germany, France, the United States of America and Japan.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The annual rate of consumer price inflation in November 1985 (the latest date available for international comparisons) for the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the United States of America and Japan were respectively 5·5 per cent., 1·8 per cent., 4·8 per cent., 3·6 per cent. and 1·9 per cent.

Taxation

28. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce taxation as a percentage of gross national product.

Mr. Moore: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

29. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have ceased to pay tax as a result of Government policies since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: In 1985-86 about 1·4 million fewer individuals will pay income tax, compared with an indexed 1978-79 tax regime.

30. **Mr. Pike** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated percentage of pay a married man with two children on average earnings receives in take home pay after tax and national insurance at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Moore: 77·9 per cent. taking account, in addition, of child benefit.

34. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in the last six months concerning the tax burden on the lower paid.

Mr. Moore: I have received a large number of representations covering a variety of proposals.

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether, in the manner of the answer given on 18 April 1985 *Official Report*, column *243*, he will publish and update the tax relief figures for 1985-86;

(2) whether, in the manner of the answer given on 14 February 1985, *Official Report*, column *288*, he will publish an updated table on direct revenue effects for 1985-86.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Local Authorities (Capital Receipts)

31. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the contribution to control of the rate of inflation arising from restrictions on local authority spending of capital receipts.

Mr. MacGregor: Steady adherence to the medium term financial strategy has been the key to the Government's success in reducing inflation. Continued restraint on all public spending and borrowing—local authorities included—is vital if further progress towards stable prices is to be made. However, it is not possible to isolate the effect of the controls on local authority spending from other controls on public expenditure.

Interest and Exchange Rates

35. **Mr. Straw** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards interest rates and the exchange rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Government will continue to take whatever steps are necessary to maintain downward pressure on inflation.

Interest Rates

37. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the level of interest rates.

41. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of real interest rates.

48. **Mr. Soames** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates.

58. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the present level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer hon. Members to the answer my right hon. Friend gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman).

40. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely impact on British manufacturing industry of lower interest rates.

49. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the present relationship between the level of interest rates charged to borrowers through the banking system and the real rate of growth of the manufacturing base and the United Kingdom economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The level of interest rates is only one of the factors which affect the economy. This year we expect both manufacturing output and GDP to continue the steady growth we have seen for the past five years.

59. **Mr. Bermingham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received a number of letters from members of the public and other bodies on the subject.

Capital Expenditure

38. **Mr. Craigen** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about public sector capital expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the relevant sections of the recently published 1986 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702), copies of which are in the Library.

World Debt

39. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has made any assessment of the cost to the United Kingdom of writing off the debts of the world's poorest countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Although our policy of commuting aid loans to grants to the poorest countries has benefited 21 countries at a cost of £987 million, we have made no assessment of the cost to the United Kingdom of writing off all the debts of such countries.

Scientific and Medical Research

44. **Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to introduce fiscal incentives to increase private sector investment in scientific and medical research in universities.

Mr. Moore: Tax relief is already available for payments to universities for research in a wide variety of circumstances.

Value Added Tax

47. **Mr. Freud** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to seek to change the current incidence of levy of value added tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I regret that I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Bingo Duty

50. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current estimated cost per annum of the inspection, monitoring and collection of bingo duty from non-profit making working men's clubs.

Mr. Brooke: The cost of administering the betting and gaming duties as a whole in 1984-85 was £6·4 million, or approximately 1 per cent. of the revenue raised. I regret that the part of this cost attributable to bingo duty cannot readily be ascertained, and it would in any case not be possible to identify the costs relating to the clubs my hon. Friend has in mind.

Economic Demand

51. **Mr. Knox** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of total demand in the economy.

Mr. MacGregor: Total real demand in the economy, interpreted as total final expenditure on goods and services, is provisionally estimated to have risen by 3½ per cent. in 1985 and a further 3½ per cent. rise is expected this year.

Business Expansion Scheme

52. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the funds raised by the business expansion scheme has gone to manufacturing companies.

Mr. Moore: In 1983-84 about one third of the amount of qualifying investment went to manufacturing companies. Information about 1984-85 investments is still incomplete.

Mr. Rowe asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has information on the average rate and total cost of the fees and professional and related charges levied by institutions or other financial intermediaries against funds raised under the provisions of the business expansion scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: This information is not collected.

Heritage Assets (Taxation)

53. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring forward proposals to alleviate the incidence of capital taxation upon heritage assets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Economic Improvement

54. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what improvement there has been in the economy of the United Kingdom in the last year.

Mr. MacGregor: Among the factors, GDP is provisionally estimated to have grown by 3½ per cent. in 1985, inflation fell to 5½ per cent. in the last quarter of 1985 and the latest employment figures show an annual rise of 220,000.

Company Profitability

55. **Mr. Michael Brown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of company profitability at present compared with 10 years ago.

Mr. MacGregor: On the basis of figures for the first three quarters of the year, the profitability of all industrial and commercial companies in 1985, as measured by the net pre-tax real rate of return on capital employed, is believed to have been about three times higher than in 1975.

Johnson Matthey Bank

56. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding the sale of Johnson Matthey Bank.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 16 January at column *649*.

Macroeconomic Policy

57. **Mr. Michie** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the impact of his macroeconomic policy on the level of employment.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government's macroeconomic policy, together with its supply-side measures, have led to the creation of nearly 700,000 jobs since June 1983, more than in all of the other European Community countries put together.

Building Alterations (VAT)

60. **Mr. Hannam** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been received on the effect value added tax on building alterations is having on charities.

Mr. Brooke: Since April 1985 21 letters have been received about the effect of value added tax on the cost of building alterations incurred by charities.

Unemployment Costs

62. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's estimate of the overall annual cost to the Exchequer of unemployment; and how this figure is calculated.

Mr. MacGregor: It is estimated that the overall cost to the Exchequer of benefits to the unemployed was about £6,800 million in 1985-86. It is not possible to estimate the revenue forgone.

Budget Representations

63. **Mr. Parry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the construction industry concerning his forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Moore: I have received a number of representations covering a variety of proposals.

National Economic Development Council

Mr. Haynes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next plans to meet the National Economic Development Council.

Mr. MacGregor: Wednesday 5 March 1986.

Oil Prices (Economic Effects)

Mr. Hayward asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the overall effect in terms of jobs on the British economy arising from the fall in production costs by the recent decline in the price of crude oil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Industry will certainly benefit from lower production costs as oil prices fall; but the outlook for employment still depends crucially on the level of pay settlements.

Lloyd's (Reinsurance)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what view the Inland Revenue takes on future reinsurance at Lloyd's for the purposes of the payment of tax.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cigarettes (Taxation)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the effect on the revenue of increasing the tax upon cigarettes by 6p, 13p and 20p per 20 cigarettes, respectively.

Mr. Brooke: The estimated net additional revenue, at 1986-87 prices, would be:

Increase in price of 20 cigarettes (pence)	*Full year revenue yield (£ million)*
6	190
13	405
20	610

The larger the price increase, the greater the degree of uncertainty to which the estimates are subject.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the estimated cost of providing mortgage interest tax relief in 1985-86 and 1986-87, at 1985-86 prices, showing separately the estimated cost of mortgages previously under the option mortgage scheme.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 31 January 1986, c. *647*]: The total cost of mortgage interest relief is estimated to be about £4,750 million in 1985-86. It is not possible to distinguish the cost of relief for those mortgages which were previously under the option mortgage scheme. It would be premature to provide an estimate for 1986-87, since the cost will depend on the amounts of mortgage lending and interest rates as well as on the 1986-87 income tax rates and bands.

DEFENCE

Ammunition

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the size, number and names of foreign manufacturers who have supplied 5·56 mm ammunition to the United Kingdom in the years *(a)* 1981-82, *(b)* 1982-83, *(c)* 1983-84 and *(d)* 1984-85, respectively; and what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that these tenders held no element of state subsidy.

Mr. Lee: The information is as follows:

Size	*Number purchased by MOD (000)*	*Manufacturer*
1981-82		
Nil		
1982-83		
5·56 Blank	100	Dynamit Nobel
1983-84		
5·56 Ball (M193)	2,900	Hirtenberger Patronen
5·56 Blank	600	Dynamit Nobel
1984-85		
5·56 Ball (M193)	2,000	Hirtenberger Patronen
5·56 Tracer	1,000	Fabrique Nationale

When purchasing the ammunition, we had no reason to establish whether the tenders contained an element of state subsidy. Ammunition of this type was not available from a United Kingdom manufacturer at the material times and therefore foreign procurement was a necessity.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the tender procedure for the purchase of 5·56 mm ammunition by the Government will be opened to overseas manufacturers during 1985-86.

Mr. Lee: Tenders for 5·56 mm ammunition in 1985-86 were opened to overseas manufacturers only to the extent dictated by the non-availability of suitable United Kingdom rounds.

NATO

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the posts, ranks and responsibilities of his officials who represent the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation planning board for European inland surface transport; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Low Flying

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many special defence exercises took place in 1985 involving low-flying training; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of the exercises, their duration, and the extent of additional low flying undertaken.

Mr. Lee: In 1985 the defence exercises which involved unusual or an additional amount of low flying were:

Exercise	*Duration*
Purple Victory	20 days
Minibus	15 days
Mallet Blow (series of three exercises)	14 days total
Gryphon's Gold	10 days
Brave Defender	8 days
Priory (series of two exercises)	7 days total
Fast Buzzard	7 days
Hardy Crab	7 days
Rampant Horde	7 days
Wild Bellerophon	6 days
Black Boy	5 days
Central Enterprise	5 days
Chequered Flag	5 days
OSEX 11	5 days
Bronco	2 days
Feldom Moor/Northern Warrior	2 days
Green King	2 days
Long Hop	2 days
Polar Dawn	2 days
Swift Drop	2 days

The extent of any additional low flying undertaken during these exercises is not readily available, and could not be obtained without disproportionate effort.

Armoured Personnel Carriers

Mr. Hawksley asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any proposals to purchase armoured personnel carriers for the British troops in the Berlin Brigade with money provided by the German Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 24 January at columns *333-34*.

British Forces (Berlin)

Mr. Hawksley asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to seek to amend the 26 May 1952 declaration on Berlin, Cmd. 8564, in so far as it relates to the purchase of armoured equipment for British forces stationed in Berlin.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Research and Development

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure for research and development was allocated in 1983-84 to those companies listed in annex G of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates", Cmnd. 9430-I, which were paid over £100 million for equipment in 1983-84.

Mr. Lee: Research and Development expenditure totalling approximately £800 million was allocated in 1983-84 to those companies listed in annex G of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates", Cmnd. 9430-I, which were paid over £100 million for equipment in 1983-84. This represents over half of total extramural research and development expenditure with private industry and public corporations in that year. Expenditure allocated to the individual companies is commercial in confidence.

Departmental Land (Risley)

Mr. Boyes asked the Secretary of State for Defence for what purpose the 94 acres of woodland at Risely in

Bedfordshire are still held by his Department; why they are not fenced off; if there is any danger of contamination from the adjoining three acres which are fenced off and contain warning signs of a poison gas area; and if he has any intention of returning the 94 acres to civilian use.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As my noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Support confirmed in his letter of 11 November 1985 to the hon. Member, the 3-acre former storage site at Risely has to remain in MOD ownership until we have totally reliable information on the nature of the chemical contamination. This will be the subject of investigation later this year. The surrounding 94 acres is being retained as there is a greater degree of risk, should it be sold and developed for housing, that members of the public might break into the fenced area. The unfenced area is not itself contaminated.

TRANSPORT

London Country Bus Services Ltd.

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *45*, when he expects to make a decision on the future structure of London Country Bus Services Limited to enable the management and staff to consider putting forward purchase proposals.

Mr. Ridley: I have today given the National Bus Company directions under section 48(5) of the Transport Act 1985, requiring it to make provision in its disposal programme for the division by 1 September 1986 of the local bus operations of four of their subsidiaries. A copy of the directions has been laid before each House. The details are as follows:

Subsidiary	*To be divided into:*
United Automobile Services Ltd.	3 parts
Ribble Motor Services Ltd.	3 parts
Crosville Motor Services Ltd.	2 parts
London Country Bus Services Ltd.	4 parts

NCB's main objective under the 1985 Act is to promote sustained and fair competition, both between its own subsidiaries and between those operators and others. The board of NBC proposed last year the division of five of the company's subsidiaries: Bristol Omnibus, Southdown, United Counties, Alder Valley and United Automobile. They did not consider it appropriate to split up Ribble, Crosville and London Country because it would, in its view, weaken the competitive position of these companies and delay their privatisation. My view, based on a detailed analysis of local circumstances by my consultants, Price Waterhouse, is that these three very large companies could, if left intact, undermine the development of competition in large areas of the country and so deny many bus passengers the early benefits that deregulation is designed to bring.

I have concluded that the right way to proceed in order to allay the board's concern about the discharge of their duties under the Transport Act is to give directions to the NBC.

Four of the subsidiaries which the NBC itself proposed to split have already been divided. Division of United Automobile has not yet taken place and I have therefore included it in the directions for the sake of completeness. The directions allow for part of United Automobile to join NBC's East Yorkshire subsidiary and for part of Ribble to join Cumberland Motor Services, as suggested by NBC.

The directions will resolve the uncertainty about the future structure of these companies and will enable the local managers and employees to consider whether to make proposals to buy their companies. I very much hope that they decide to do so.

Road Safety

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to the answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *40*, he will publish periodically the results of the Transport Road Research Laboratory monitoring of the road safety schemes referred to in the answer; and with what frequency.

Mr. Michael Spicer: These schemes are each being monitored for a period of two years after implementation and a full assessment of their effects will be made at the end of this period. It is intended that these results will be published in TRRL research reports. During the monitoring period, interim reports are being provided to local transportation committees as and when they are requested.

Roads (Maintenance)

Mr. Fry asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each highway authority the local road maintenance element of the rate support grant equated to the figure of £1,115 million given in the Department of Transport press notice No. 24 of 17 January and referred to in paragraph 59 of section 3.8 of Cmnd. 9702-II.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Rate support grant is paid in support of an authority's total expenditure and is not divisible between the different services it provides. One part of the calculation, the authority's grant related expenditure assessment is the sum of separate components for each service. These are calculated by applying a separate distribution formula to the total public expenditure provision for each service. The grant depends on an authority's actual total expenditure compared with its total GREA and the result of this calculation is incapable of disaggregation by service. The make-up of the GREs for each authority is set out in full in the "GRE Technical Handbook" issued in March each year. A copy is placed in the Library of the House.

Airedale Route

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with the study of links between the A629-A650 Airedale route at Cottingley Bar and the Shipley eastern bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are planning to consult the public this summer about improvements to the A650 between Cottingley Bar and the Shipley eastern bypass. I shall write to my hon. Friend when arrangements have been settled.

Public Service Vehicles (Tests)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report*, by

operator group, the numbers of public service vehicles which failed the annual test for the South Wales traffic area for each of the past five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Public service vehicle annual test statistics are available only from 1982-83 onwards. The number of failures after rectification of minor faults is as follows:

South Wales traffic area—PSV failure rate (by operator group)

Operator	*Total number of tests*	*Number failed*	*Per cent.*
1982-83			
National Bus Company	922	266	29
Local authority	501	105	21
Private	2,176	747	34
1983-84			
National Bus Company	834	112	13
Local authority	503	44	9
Private	2,198	658	30
1984-85			
National Bus Company	693	64	9
Local authority	462	34	7
Private	1,859	515	28

M25 (Service Stations)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Transport when the decision was taken to site a service station on the M25 at Clacket lane, Titsey Wood, Croydon; when planning permission was granted; and if he will list all other sites approved, or currently being considered, for service stations along the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Proposals for the provision of four motorway service areas on the M25 were announced on 30 July 1984. The sites proposed are at Clacket lane, Iver, South Mimms and Thurrock. No planning permission has yet been given for the site at Clacket lane. Our proposals for this site has been the subject of objections from local authorities. A public local inquiry is to be held, probably in the spring. A final decision will then be taken in the light of the report of the inspector who takes the inquiry.

Light Dues

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes any changes in light dues following the Arthur Andersen and Co. report to him in April 1985.

Mr. Ridley: The recommendations in this report attracted a large number of comments from individual and representative bodies. I am considering the issues carefully and I shall make a further statement in due course.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate by what amount British Rail's external financing limit will be increased to cover the cost of new Channel tunnel-related rolling stock, freight locomotives, international passenger facilities, track and signalling improvements and maintenance facilities.

Mr. Ridley: BR envisages that it would need to spend up to £390 million if high speed passenger services are provided, or up to about £290 million if conventional speed services are provided. The actual amounts will depend on BR's consideration of each element of the investment on its commercial merits. The expenditure will be spread over several years, largely in the period 1990-91 to 1992-93. External financing limits for these years have not yet been set. For these reasons it is not possible at this stage to estimate the exact impact on BR's requirements for external finance.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Transport what are the estimated costs of the road improvements necessary to cope with Channel tunnel traffic as outlined in the White Paper.

Mr. Ridley: The estimated total cost of the national road improvements specified in the White Paper is £135 million, all of which would have been incurred without a fixed link being built, in order to improve road links to the ferry points. The cost of improving local roads in the area is a matter for Kent county council, which will be submitting proposals for transport supplementary grant in due course.

Tachographs

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects publication of the final version of amendments to EC 543/69 and 1463/70 on tachographs and drivers' rest periods.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The consolidated versions of the amended drivers' hours and tachograph regulations (EC 3820/85 and 3281/85) were published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities of 31 December 1985.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to issue consultation papers on *(a)* the application of the new derogation provisions in article 13 of European Community Regulation 543/69 on tachographs and *(b)* other changes to United Kingdom legislation consequent upon the amendments to the European Community regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Consultation papers on permissible derogations and proposed changes to United Kingdom domestic legislation will be issued shortly.

NATO Committees

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will state the names, posts and employers of the non-government officials who represent the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation planning board for ocean shipping;

(2) if he will state the posts, rank and responsibilities of the officials who represent the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation planning board for ocean shipping; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mr. Ridley: The United Kingdom is represented on this planning board by a grade 5 officer, a grade 6 officer and a grade 7 officer from the shipping policy directorate and a grade 5 officer from the directorate of economics of my Department, and by a director and a manager of the General Council of British Shipping. In addition, the director of shipping policy (grade 3) in my Department is

one of the two joint chairmen of the board. The planning board meets annually in plenary session alternately in London and Washington.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the posts, ranks and responsibilities of his officials who represent the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation planning board for European inland surface transport; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The United Kingdom is represented on the planning board for European Inland Surface Transport by the head of the Department's defence planning and emergencies division (grade 6) accompanied by two representatives from the Ministry of Defence. The committee meets twice a year at NATO headquarters, Brussels.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the post, rank and responsibilities of the official who represents the United Kingdom on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation civil aviation planning committee; how often this committee meets; and where it meets.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The United Kingdom is represented on this committee by the grade 7 head of branch whose responsibilities cover civil aviation aspects of defence planning. The civil aviation planning committee meets twice yearly at HQ NATO Brussels.

Boeing 747 (Safety)

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the report he has received from the Civil Aviation Authority about the structural safety of Boeing 747 aircraft.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 7 February 1986, at column 272, to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan). The Civil Aviation Authority has informed me that the initial inspection of the aircraft skin showed that no United Kingdom registered were cracked. Subsequently, cracks requiring repair were found in the internal structure of three aircraft as a result of additional inspections.

The CAA expects that as further aircraft are subjected to these inspections more may be found requiring repair, but the evidence does not warrant a general withdrawal of the type from service because the cracking is within the structural capability of the aircraft. The CAA has agreed a programme of inspection and repair where necessary. Each aeroplane takes three to four days for this work to be carried out and all aircraft should be completed by the end of March.

East London (River Crossing)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report of the public consultation undertaken in October/November 1981 on which his predecessor based his decision on the preferred east London river crossing scheme announced on 27 July 1982.

Mr. David Mitchell: The results of the public consultation exercise were made available in a public statement issued in July 1982. Copies were placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 February 1986

WALES

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for the latest year for which information is available for each hon. and right hon. Member representing constituencies in Wales, the arithmetic mean in days that his Department took to reply to letters.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information is given in the table:

Letters received from hon. and right hon. Members representing constituencies in Wales between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 1985

Constituency	*Average number of working days taken to reply*
Aberavon	16
Alyn and Deeside	13
Blaenau Gwent	15
Brecon and Radnor*	12
Bridgend	15
Caernarfon	16
Caerphilly	15
Cardiff Central	15
Cardiff North	13
Cardiff South and Penarth	14
Cardiff West	17
Carmarthen	13
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	14
Clwyd North West	15
Clwyd South West	14
Cynon Valley	13
Delyn	15
Gower	16
Islwyn	11
Llanelli	14
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	17
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	13
Monmouth	15
Montgomery	15
Neath	18
Newport East	14
Ogmore	12
Pontypridd	12
Rhondda	15
Swansea East	15
Swansea West	16
Torfaen	15
Vale of Glamorgan	14
Wrexham	15
Ynys Mon	14

* This figure refers only to the sitting Member

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for the latest year for which information is available, the total numbers of letters that he has received from hon. and right hon. Members representing constituencies in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Between 1 January 1985 and 31 December 1985, the latest year for which figures are available, Ministers in my Department received 2,667 letters from hon. and right hon. Members representing constituencies in Wales, which required substantive replies.

In addition several hundred letters were received but not recorded. These included letters that required a standard reply, were copied for information or provided further information about an ongoing case.

Local Authority Budgets

Mr. Keith Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will take steps to persuade Welsh local authorities to moderate their 1986-87 budget and rating proposals.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I am disappointed that the proposals announced by the Welsh councils markedly exceed the forecast level of inflation. As the local authorities understand, spending in excess of the settlement provision brings with it penalties in the form of reduced grant entitlement and hence increased rates. I shall shortly be discussing the situation with the Welsh local authority associations and I hope that as a result the proposals so far announced will be moderated before final decisions are taken.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Church Schools, Ealing

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the proposed level of expenditure by his Department for the year 1986-87 on church schools in the London borough of Ealing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The capital expenditure allocations announced by the Department on 18 December 1985 included £331,000 in respect of continuing work on Phase II of the redevelopment of Twyford Church of England School in Ealing. Grant of 85 per cent. will be paid by the Department on this expenditure. No other capital works project at a voluntary aided or special agreement school in Ealing could be accommodated in the capital expenditure programme. The Department's contribution to expenditure by governors on repairs to voluntary schools within an individual local authority cannot be estimated in advance.

Chiropody

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now reconsider his decision regarding the inclusion of the study of chiropody in his mandatory list of courses.

Mr. Walden: There is no present intention to reconsider the inclusion of chiropody courses among those which attract mandatory awards.

Teachers (Pay)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were teachers' salaries in January 1979 and January 1984, respectively; and what is the difference in real terms for each of the scales.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is contained in the table. Each salary scale contains a number of incremental points and scale minima and maxima have been used for illustration.

Salary scales for teachers (P + S) in operation at January 1979 and January 1984**

Scale	April 1978 Min. £	Max. £	April 1983 Min. £	Max. £	†Difference in real terms Min. Per cent.	Max. Per cent.
1	2,964	‡4,662	5,178	¶8,142	2·2	2·1
2	3,408	‖5,184	5,949	•9,132	2·1	3·0
3	4,212	5,958	7,359	10,497	2·2	3·0
4	5,010	6,621	8,754	11,763	2·2	3·9
Senior teachers	5,355	7,083	9,435	12,744	3.0	5·2
Deputy head■	3,663	8,682	6,477	15,879	3·4	7·0
Head■	5,070	11,544	9,108	21,828	5·1	10·6

* Scales of salaries with effect from 1 April 1979 and 1 April 1983.
† Using the April 1978 and April 1983 RPI.
‡ Scale extended by two increments for teachers classed as good honours graduates ie £4,839 and £5,010.
¶ Good honours graduate teachers receiving £3,609 on 31 March 1975 were entitled to receive a personal salary of £5,355.
‖ Scale extended by two increments for teachers classed as good honours graduates ie £8,454 and £8,754.
• Good honours graduate teachers receiving £3,609 on 31 March 1975 were entitled to receive a personal salary of £9,435.
■ Salaries of qualified Deputy Head Teachers and Heads are determined by the school group ie, the number and age distribution of the pupils. The minimum and maximum incremental points have been used, starting at "below group 4" (the lowest group for Deputies), and group 1 for Headteachers, rising to group 14 (the largest schools) for both Heads and their deputies.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average headmaster's salary in January 1979 and January 1986, respectively; and what is the percentage difference in real terms.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Department does not hold information in the form requested. Teachers' pay is negotiated with effect from 1 April each year, and no increases has been implemented since 1 April 1984. The average salary for head teachers in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales was £6,920 in April 1978 and £13,250 in April 1984, an increase in real terms of 6·3 per cent.

Examination Results

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to ensure that all schools in England are publishing examination results information in accordance with the Education (School Information) Regulations 1981.

Mr. Dunn: The regulations impose a duty on local education authorities and governing bodies to publish such information. It would not be possible for the Department to monitor the discharge of this duty in all schools, but any failure that came to the Department's attention would be pursued.

DEFENCE

Information, Press and Public Relations

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of people employed on information, press and public relations work in his Department in each of the past five years, together with the annual costs over the same period.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The number of service personnel and civilians employed on information, press and public relations work in the Ministry of Defence in the years 1982-83 to 1985-86, together with the annual staffing costs over the same period, is as follows:

Year	Numbers	Cost £ million
1982-83	222	4·0
1983-84	290	4·8
1984-85	282½	5·3
1985-86	249½	5·1

Figures for 1981-82 are not readily available and could not be obtained without disproportionate expense. The numbers given for 1983-84 onwards include all service personnel and civilians in complemented PR posts in London and in commands and districts at home and overseas; the 1982-83 figure was not prepared on this comprehensive basis.

Armed Forces Overseas

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will indicate the numerical strength of the armed forces in West Germany, Belgium, France, Holland and Italy; and if he will estimate the percentage of each of the individual totals that is represented by conscripts.

Mr. Stanley: The information requested is a matter for the countries concerned. Unofficial information on these countries' armed forces is, however, contained in "The Military Balance 1985-1986", published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, a copy of which is in the Library.

Royal Navy

Mr. Viggers asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the anticipated manpower in the Royal Navy for each year until 1993.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is not the practice to give detailed forward figures for the strength of the armed forces, as these are subject to change in the light of operational and other considerations. As announced,

however, in the 1985 "Statement on the Defence Estimates", on current plans naval manpower numbers are expected to have declined by about 11,000 in the early 1990s from the 1981 level.

United States Base (Cyprus)

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details of the United States forces contingent at the Akrotiri base in Cyprus, in particular *(a)* the number of personnel, *(b)* the number and type of aircraft they support, *(c)* the role of the contingent and *(d)* the agreement under which the United States contingent is stationed there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Service Pay

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were the salaries of an air marshal, admiral and general on 1 January 1979 and 1986; and what is the percentage difference in real terms.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The salaries of these officers on the dates concerned were:

Rank	*1st January 1979* £	*1st January 1986* £
Admiral, General (and Air Chief Marshal)	19,947	52,750
Air Marshal	15,62°	39,250

Note: The equivalent RAF rank to admiral and general is air chief marshal.

Over this period the salaries of admirals and generals (and air chief marshals) rose by 82 per cent. in real terms as measured against the retail price index. For air marshals the figure is 68 per cent.

Hong Kong

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will provide information about all facilities the British base in Hong Kong provides for visiting warships;

(2) if he will list by country and class, the number of visiting warships to the British base in Hong Kong in the last five years.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Ascension Island

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will outline the facilities the British base in Ascension Island provides for visiting warships.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

SCOTLAND

Bathing Beaches

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those bathing beaches in Scotland which do not presently conform with established EEC standards.

Mr. Ancram: No beaches in Scotland are at present listed under the EC bathing water directive.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to monitor bathing beaches in Scotland to ensure they conform to EEC quality standards;

(2) if he will undertake to carry out and publish a study of the quality of bathing beaches at all major tourist resorts in Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: At the Government's request, local river purification boards are to monitor the quality of bathing water on 20 beaches in Scotland over the next two bathing seasons. Consideration will be given to publication of the results. The list of bathing waters is:

Nairn
Aberdeen
Cullen
Fraserburgh
Arbroath
Carnoustie
St. Andrews
Aberdour
Gullane
Kinghorn
North Berwick
Yellowcraigs
Pease Bay
Sandyhills
Ayr
Girvan
Irvine-Gailes
Prestwick
Saltcoats, Ardrossan
Troon (south)

National Joint Working Party on Physical Education

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy towards the future operation of the national joint working party on physical education in the light of the decision by members representing teachers to withdraw; whether he still proposes to issue guidelines on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Following the withdrawal of the teacher members of the standard grade joint working party on physical education, the JWP proceeded to complete its report. This was approved by the joint working parties steering committee and it will be issued by the Scottish Examination Board for comment by interested bodies including the teachers' associations. Whether or not the JWP is required to do any further work will depend on the outcome of these consultations.

Conveyancing Services

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he proposes to introduce legislation to permit financial and other institutions to offer conveyancing services in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no plans to do so at present. The Building Societies Bill currently before the House will give my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor power to recognise institutions for the purpose of providing conveyancing services in respect of land in England and Wales. I have decided that it would be inappropriate for me to take similar powers in Scotland where the house purchase and conveyancing systems differ significantly from those in England and Wales. I shall be keeping the position under review to ensure that the interests of those buying and selling houses in Scotland are adequately safeguarded.

PRIME MINISTER

Top Salaries Review Body

Mr. William Powell asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about the future of the Top Salaries Review Body.

The Prime Minister: The Top Salaries Review Body is currently working on its 1986 recommendations and is expected to report in April.

Westland plc

Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 11 February, what action was taken in connection with the report by the then Secretary of State for Defence alleging that the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had urged the managing director of the leading company in the European Westland consortium to withdraw in the national interest, during the period between the receipt by the private office of that report on 8 January and the discussion of Westland plc by the Cabinet on 9 January.

The Prime Minister: As is clear from the text of Sir Clive Whitmore's letter of 13 January to Sir John Cuckney, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House on 27 January, that letter was written in response to a letter from Sir John Cuckney of 10 January putting questions about Government policy.

Mr. Dobson asked the Prime Minister whether she spoke to Sir Raymond Lygo between the publication on 15 January of his verbatim notes of his meeting with the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and the publication of his letter to him of 17 January.

The Prime Minister: No.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Pensions

Mr. Harvey asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if similar pension arrangements to those that will apply for Hong Kong civil servants after 1997 will be extended to other surviving former overseas colonial service employees.

Mr. Raison: Arrangements for pensions for Hong Kong civil servants are the responsibility of the Hong Kong Government and are not therefore applicable to former overseas colonial service officers elsewhere.

Aid

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present level of aid to *(a)* Nicaragua, *(b)* El Salvador, *(c)* Honduras and *(d)* Guatemala.

Mr. Raison: I have no more recent information than I gave in the answer to the hon. Member's question on the same subject on 11 November 1985 at column *38*.

Developing Countries

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the figures for *(a)* current and *(b)* constant 1974 prices and *(c)* expressed as a proportion of gross national product for official, private and total flows from the United Kingdom to developing countries for each calender year since 1974.

Mr. Raison: The information requested is contained in the following tables:

Net official flows from the United Kingdom to developing countries*

Year	*Current prices £ million*	*†Constant (1974) prices £ million*	*Percentage of GNP*
1974	713	713	0·84
1975	839	659	0·79
1976	973	665	0·77
1977	712	427	0·49
1978	968	522	0·58
1979	1,083	510	0·55
1980	726	285	0·32
1981	1,253	440	0·49
1982	1,117	365	0·40
1983	1,198	373	0·40
1984	1,419	423	0·44

* Official development assistance and other official flows (including ECGD official export credits and ECGD interest stabilisation payments), measured net of loan repayments. Based on internationally agreed definitions.

† Calculated using GDP deflator.

Net private flows from the United Kingdom to developing countries*

Year	*Current prices £ million*	*†Constant (1974) prices £ million*	*Percentage of GNP*
1974	399	399	0·47
1975	2,137	1,680	2·02
1976	3,503	2,394	2·77
1977	3,208	1,925	2·21
1978	3,916	2,111	2·33
1979	5,277	2,487	2·67
1980	4,527	1,779	1·97
1981	4,596	1,614	1·81
1982	2,463	805	0·89
1983	2,813	875	0·93
1984	1,420	423	0·44

* Private export credits, long term private investment and grants by voluntary agencies.

† Calculated using GDP deflator.

Total net flows from the United Kingdom to developing countries

Year	*Current prices £ million*	**Constant (1974) prices £ million*	*Percentage of GNP*
1974	1,112	1,112	1·31
1975	2,976	2,339	2·81
1976	4,476	3,059	3·54
1977	3,920	2,325	2·70
1978	4,884	2,633	2·91
1979	6,360	2,997	3·22
1980	5,253	2,064	2·29
1981	5,849	2,054	2·31
1982	3,580	1,170	1·30
1983	4,011	1,248	1·33
1984	2,839	847	0·88

* Calculated using GDP deflator.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Air Weapons

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to follow up the "Gun Sense is Good Sense" campaign in 1983; and what further measures he proposes to continue education about the hazards arising from misuse of air weapons.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I continue to attach great importance to ensuring that people who acquire air weapons are correctly instructed in their use. It was always our intention to continue the education process after the formal campaign had ended. The material produced in connection with the campaign is still being used, and the television films were shown about 60 times in the first nine months of 1985. In the light of our assessment of the campaign I am considering the feasibility and cost of further campaigns in those areas in which the highest number of air weapons offences have been recorded.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for firearms certificates relating to the possession and purchase of licensable air weapons have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused in each year since 1979 (i) in London and (ii) in total nationally.

Mr. Giles Shaw: This information is not available. Under the Firearms (Dangerous Air Weapons) Rules 1969 certificates are only required in respect of certain high powered air weapons. I understand from inquiries made of police firearms officers that they receive very few applications for such certificates.

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received on the nationality position of non-ethnic Chinese citizens in Hong Kong after 1997.

Mr. Waddington: About 40.

Inner City Policing

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reassess the Scarman proposals for inner city policing.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Action has been taken on the specific recommendations for the police in Lord Scarman's report on the 1981 Brixton disorders. The principles of policing upon which Lord Scarman based his proposals continue to be the underlying principles of policing in this country, and will continue to be developed to try to meet the needs of the community which the police serve.

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Hurd: I last met the commissioner privately on 6 February when we discussed the use of firearms by the police. The commissioner and a number of his senior colleagues also attended the meeting which I held on 10 February with the London Boroughs' Association, the Association of London Authorities, and the Outer London Districts Metropolitan Police Consultative Association to discuss his recent strategy report. A wide range of subjects was discussed at that meeting, including finance, manpower, ethnic minority recruitment, the force reorganisation, co-operation between the police and local authorities, the Holloway road assault case, standards of professional conduct and traffic matters.

Styal Prison

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals for increasing the staffing at Her Majesty's prison, Styal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Arrangements have been made for five additional officers to take up post at Styal with effect from 31 March.

Police (Pay)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the salaries of constables, sergeants and chief inspectors on 1 January in 1979 and 1986; and what is the percentage difference in real terms.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information requested follows:

Rank	*January 1979*		*January 1986*	
	Minimum	*Maximum*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Constable	3,189	4,809	7,212	12,033
Sergeant	4,683	5,406	11,508	13,203
Chief Inspector	6,198	7,260	14,991	17,388

The cumulative increase arising from annual pay settlements since January 1979 is 148·3 per cent. Over the period January 1979 to November 1985 underlying average earnings have risen by 106 per cent. while between January 1979 and December 1985 the retail prices index rose by 82·9 per cent. and the tax and price index by 81·3 per cent.

Animals (Experiments)

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department which laboratories have been investigated under the Cruelty to Animals Act since 1980.

Mr. Mellor: All premises registered under the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 are visited by inspectors, mainly without notice. The numbers of these visits since 1977 are given in Cmnd. 9574, page 30, table 24 together with the numbers of registered premises concerned. It is not our practice to give details of individual premises.

Immigration

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to seek to amend the immigration rules or the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Waddington: As my right hon. Friend announced on 23 January, at column *274* the Government intend to introduce legislation in the lifetime of this Parliament to the effect that an offence of overstaying is committed on the day when the overstayer first knows that his leave has expired and that it continues to be committed throughout any period during which he remains in the United Kingdom thereafter.

As my right hon. and learned Friend, the then Secretary of State told the House on 23 July 1985, at column *894* the Government intend to introduce legislation to put an end to the sexually discriminatory features of section 1(5) of the Immigration Act 1971 in a way that preserves the Government's commitment to firm immigration control.

The Government have at present no plans to amend the immigration rules, but all immigration control arrangements are kept under continuous re-examination.

Police (Offices)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance is issued by his Department to chief constables and police authorities on the criteria governing, and the level of expenditure which is allowed for, removal expenses and the equipping of offices for senior police officers;

(2) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the West Midlands about the amount of expenses he has claimed in the last financial year for removal of furniture, equipping offices and installation of burglar alarms.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Police authorities are required by the Police Regulations 1979, as amended, to reimburse removal costs reasonably incurred by senior officers joining their forces. It is entirely for the police authority to determine the sum paid in any particular case. It is also for the authority alone to decide what equipement should be provided for senior officers. The Home Office issues no guidance on these matters.

El-Al Aircraft

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether employees of El-Al are permitted to remove their weapons from their aircraft at Heathrow.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Firearms which are carried on board an aircraft for security purposes are required to be surrendered to the police or customs on arrival. If the aircraft is staying only a short time, the firearms are sealed in a container on board. If the aircraft is staying longer, the firearms are kept in safe custody by the police and returned shortly before it leaves.

South Yorkshire Police

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of South Yorkshire as to the number of people prosecuted in the last 12 months for which figures are available for the alleged illegal sale or renting of firearms.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall reply as soon as possible.

Firearms

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce legislation to restrict the circumstances in which licences may be obtained for firearms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given yesterday to a question from the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) at column *516*.

Immigrant Prisoners (Relocation)

Mrs. Roe asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the relocation of those detained in prison in the London area under powers in the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Hurd: As a result of pressures on the prison system in the London area it has become necessary to use for other purposes the accommodation currently set aside for Immigration Act detainees at Ashford remand centre. After considering various alternatives I have decided that such detainees should, for the foreseeable future be accommodated in Latchmere house remand centre in Richmond-upon-Thames. One landing will be set aside for their exclusive use and it is planned that they should move there in the latter half of this month. This will not alter the present arrangements under which some immigration detainees may need to be held in other London prisons from time to time.

ENERGY

Voluntary Insulation Groups

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his policy towards the development of voluntary insulation groups.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department's energy efficiency office will continue to provide grants for voluntary insulation projects and for the national co-ordinating charity, Neighbourhood Energy Action. The number of projects operating is expected to double by the end of 1986, Energy Efficiency Year. My Department will continue to support the expansion of this programme in collaboration with the Manpower Services Commission's community programme.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury of 13 December, *Official Report*, column 803, he will set out the reasons why it would not be in the public interest to publish details of withdrawals of nuclear materials from safeguards under the tripartite safeguards agreement, Cmnd. 6730.

Mr. Goodlad: For national security reasons.

Plutonium

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury of 10 December, *Official Report*, columns 589-90, he will set out the reasons why details of plutonium exported for civil end use are regarded as being commercially sensitive.

Mr. Goodlad: Because there is a confidentiality clause in the contracts.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury of 13 December, *Official Report*, column 804, he will *(a)* list the dates on which the plutonium exports to France referred to in his reply took place and *(b)* specify the international safeguards agreements under which these plutonium exports took place.

Mr. Goodlad: One export licence was granted in each of the following years:

1968, 1973, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984 and 1985.

The material in question is subject to Euratom safeguards in France under the terms of the Euratom treaty. Shipments since 1981 would also be subject to IAEA safeguards under the terms of the agreement between France, Euratom and the IAEA of 27 July 1978.

Mersey Barrage

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to announce a decision on the Mersey barrage project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The report of the Mersey barrage has been received by my Department and is now under consideration. I will, of course, consider seriously any proposals for taking the work forward.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates

Mr. Meacher asked the Attorney-General if he will list each bench of magistrates in the country showing the number of supporters of each of the main political parties on each.

The Attorney-General: I regret that this information could not be provided except at disproportionate cost. In any event, the information provided by a candidate at the time of appointment depends on the candidate's own description of his views at the time of application, not always clearly expressed, and may now be up to 40 years out of date.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings Statistics

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the dates on which the House has met on a Saturday; what was the main item of business under discussion; and what time the House met and at what time the House subsequently adjourned, for each session since 1956.

Mr. Biffen: The information is as follows:

Saturday 3 November 1956:
Adjournment: Subjects of debate: Middle East and Hungary.
The House met at 12 o'clock and adjourned at 3 o'clock.

Saturday 30 January 1965:
The House attended the funeral of right hon. Sir Winston Churchill.

Saturday 3 April 1982:
Adjournment: Subject of debate: Falkland Islands.
The House met at 11 o'clock and adjourned at 2 o'clock.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will publish in the *Official Report*, a list showing the dates when the House sat later than 1.30 am and at what time the House subsequently adjourned for each Session since 1959.

Mr. Biffen: The information requested is as follows:

House sits after 1.30 am
Session and time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1959-60	
1.35	6.7.60
1.47	29.6.60
2.12	19.7.60
2.35	31.5.60
2.50	22.3.60
2.57	22.6.60
4.42	8.12.59
7.35	26.7.60
1960-61	
1.31	3.7.61
2.10	6.7.61
2.11	12.4.61
2.41	27.6.61
3.05	23.3.61
3.22	16.5.61
3.32	20.2.61
4.06	22.2.61
4.09	2.5.61
4.52	23.2.61
4.54	20.6.61
5.03	13.2.61
6.16	7.6.61
6.46	15.3.61
7.20	1.8.61
8.15	15.2.61
1961-62	
1.44	3.4.62
1.55	2.7.62
2.29	5.7.62
2.30	25.7.62
2.41	17.4.62
2.52	3.7.62
5.39	15.11.61
6.30	23.7.62
7.20	27.3.62
9.00	30.7.62
1962-63	
1.35	1.5.63
1.54	6.2.63
2.10	21.5.63
3.10	28.11.62
3.10	21.3.63
3.13	8.5.63
4.45	15.7.63
5.05	26.6.63
6.14	24.7.63
1963-64	
2.05	20.7.64
2.09	18.6.64
4.11	19.3.64
8.56	29.7.64
1964-65	
1.32	17.11.65
1.32	20.7.64
1.32	29.7.65
1.38	26.5.65
1.46	12.7.65
1.49	6.7.65
1.50	27.7.65
1.52	1.11.65
2.07	21.7.65
2.57	7.12.64
2.58	14.4.65
3.00	26.11.64
3.16	21.6.65
3.25	9.12.64
3.25	22.3.65
3.31	14.7.65
3.40	22.6.65
4.07	28.6.65
4.41	2.12.64
5.06	20.5.65
5.39	29.6.65
6.22	22.7.65

	Date
6.25	31.5.65
6.39	25.5.65
11.24	3.8.65
12.06 pm	16.6.65
1.02 pm	25.3.65

Session and time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1965-66	
2.01	24.11.65
2.10	26.11.65
2.10	5.12.65
2.25	2.12.65
3.00	15.11.65
3.14	23.11.65
5.06	9.3.66
1966-67	
1.32	27.4.66
1.32	22.2.67
1.36	29.11.66
1.40	16.6.66
1.41	11.7.66
1.43	6.2.67
1.48	22.11.66
1.49	20.6.66
1.53	23.5.66
1.53	25.5.66
2.05	19.7.66
2.05	20.6.67
2.22	2.7.67
2.41	13.7.66
2.49	24.7.67
2.58	27.10.66
3.10	26.7.66
3.10	1.2.67
3.54	23.1.67
3.55	20.2.67
4.13	26.10.66
4.14	25.1.67
4.14	19.6.67
4.27	22.6.66
5.29	23.6.66
6.04	9.8.66
6.21	3.7.67
6.36	18.7.66
6.40	10.7.67
6.57	19.7.67
7.41	11.7.67
7.59	27.6.66
8.12	18.7.67
8.19	25.7.67
9.03	8.8.66
10.02	20.3.67
10.12	17.1.67
10.16	29.6.67
10.39	29.6.66
2.59 pm	13.7.67
1967-68	
1.51	21.5.68
1.58	3.4.68
2.25	23.5.68
3.28	30.1.68
3.30	23.10.68
4.25	9.4.68
5.10	9.7.68
5.41	14.3.68
6.20	5.12.67
7.22	22.5.68
8.09	28.2.68
9.23	26.6.68
10.01	29.2.68
10.02	26.3.68
10.38	24.7.68

	Date
11.58	†29.5.68
12.23 pm	†23.7.68
12.54 pm	†27.5.68
1.02 pm	†20.5.68
1.09 pm	†28.5.68
1.10 pm	†26.2.68
1968-69	
1.41	12.5.69
1.48	19.3.69
1.49	10.2.69
1.54	14.5.69
1.58	24.6.69
2.08	5.5.69
2.19	12.5.69
2.19	27.6.69
2.41	21.7.69
3.32	9.6.69
3.44	16.7.69
4.20	3.12.68
5.55	4.12.68
7.54	25.3.69
11.21	23.7.69
11.25	24.3.69
1.07 pm	†19.2.69
1.10 pm	†14.7.69
1.23 pm	†25.11.68
1.44 pm	†18.2.69
1.47 pm	†18.3.69
1.59 pm	‡16.12.68
2.00 pm	‡29.4.69
2.41 pm	12.6.69

† Sitting suspended in pursuance of Order of House (12.12.67) (now S.O. No. 2).

‡ Sitting suspended pursuant to S.O. No. 2.

Session and time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1969-70	
1.38	11.5.70
1.53	14.5.70
1.53	27.5.70
3.04	17.11.69
3.15	19.3.70
3.36	20.1.70
5.13	7.4.70
7.30	27.1.70
10.08	1.12.69
1970-71	
1.36	3.11.70
1.45	1.7.71
1.49	20.4.71
1.50	16.2.71
1.51	7.4.71
2.00	3.8.71
2.04	24.2.71
2.10	8.2.71
2.13	25.3.71
2.14	4.8.71
2.15	22.6.71
2.16	17.6.71
2.24	26.10.71
2.27	9.12.70
2.30	25.10.71
2.32	2.8.71
2.38	10.2.71
2.53	18.3.71
3.31	22.2.71
3.40	17.2.71
3.44	15.3.71
3.49	13.7.71
4.15	25.2.71
4.36	11.2.71

	Date
4.55	25.1.71
5.20	21.7.70
5.27	28.1.71
6.14	23.7.70
6.14	2.3.71
7.05	19.1.71
7.30	27.10.71
9.29	27.7.71
12.10 pm	23.3.71
1971-72	
1.37	26.4.72
1.39	7.8.72
1.40	15.3.72
1.45	10.5.72
1.52	21.6.72
1.55	14.3.72
1.58	26.7.72
2.27	19.4.72
2.29	27.6.72
2.32	7.6.72
2.33	23.2.72
2.33	13.6.72
2.42	13.3.72
2.46	12.6.72
3.02	12.7.72
3.20	19.7.72
3.30	25.4.72
3.47	18.4.72
3.48	18.1.72
3.58	25.7.72
4.01	20.3.72
4.34	15.6.72
4.58	16.5.72
5.17	31.7.72
6.26	4.7.72
6.54	17.7.72
7.41	1.3.72
10.15	15.12.71
10.22	2.8.72
1.14 pm	29.3.72
1972-73	
1.31	14.5.73
1.35	20.12.72
1.39	6.2.73
1.47	3.7.73
1.56	23.1.73
1.58	10.7.73
2.00	1.5.73
2.01	17.4.73
2.02	11.7.73
2.07	8.5.73
2.11	15.5.73
2.11	22.5.73
2.12	16.4.73
2.17	20.4.73
2.47	22.4.73
3.01	31.1.73
3.12	19.6.73
3.22	22.2.73
3.27	23.11.72
3.38	12.6.73
4.14	24.10.72
6.25	18.6.73
7.13	19.7.73
9.18	6.12.72

Session and time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1973-74	
1.44	19.12.73
3.08	21.1.74
3.20	13.11.73
10.02	16.1.74

	Date
1974	
1.32	27.6.74
1.54	22.7.74
2.13	25.3.74
2.30	18.6.74
2.50	23.7.74
3.19	25.6.74
3.23	9.4.74
5.08	30.7.74
5.31	20.3.74
1.00 pm	29.7.74
1974-75	
1.47	24.2.75
1.48	14.4.75
1.50	21.1.75
1.53	16.1.75
1.56	20.3.75
1.58	12.12.74
1.58	21.10.75
1.59	15.5.75
2.05	22.4.75
2.09	26.6.75
2.14	14.1.75
2.16	22.1.75
2.18	11.6.75
2.19	18.6.75
2.25	30.4.75
2.35	21.7.75
2.44	28.10.75
2.49	11.12.74
2.51	22.7.75
3.00	5.8.75
3.09	13.10.75
3.13	1.7.75
3.24	27.10.75
3.32	23.4.75
3.50	5.3.75
3.53	10.12.74
4.37	7.7.75
4.42	12.3.75
5.23	29.7.75
5.25	17.3.75
9.41	11.11.75
10.24	31.7.75
10.38	4.12.74
10.47	28.11.74
4.56 pm	24.7.75
1975-76	
1.33	2.12.75
1.34	17.11.76
1.35	13.4.76
1.41	16.11.76
1.43	19.5.76
1.43	22.7.76
1.44	20.5.76
1.47	22.6.76
1.54	19.7.76
1.54	14.10.76
1.57	24.5.76
1.58	15.6.76
2.00	8.6.76
2.01	4.5.76
2.12	1.11.76
2.16	3.12.75
2.19	10.6.76
2.20	27.10.76
2.25	9.6.76
2.28	14.7.76
2.34	10.11.76
2.44	28.1.76
2.45	20.7.76
2.45	25.10.76
2.49	17.12.75
2.50	21.6.76

	Date
2.57	15.7.76
3.22	3.8.76
3.33	18.3.76
3.36	30.6.76
3.51	13.7.76
4.16	7.6.76
4.23	14.6.76
5.31	18.12.75
6.15	19.10.76
6.46	12.7.76
10.21	27.7.76
11.40	4.8.76
1.41 pm	8.7.76

Session and time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1976-77	
1.32	10.5.77
1.34	14.2.77
1.40	1.12.76
1.51	28.4.77
1.53	15.2.77
1.53	16.3.77
1.55	9.12.76
2.00	20.7.77
2.10	2.3.77
2.11	12.5.77
2.50	18.1.77
3.44	25.7.77
4.52	26.7.77
4.55	27.7.77
5.04	25.1.77
5.42	7.3.77
6.03	1.2.77
6.22	19.1.77
6.54	14.12.76
7.25	13.7.77
10.39	20.12.76
3.19 pm	28.7.77
9.33 pm	21.6.77
1977-78	
1.32	23.11.77
1.32	12.12.77
1.34	23.5.78
1.39	26.1.78
1.40	29.11.77
1.40	21.6.78
1.44	17.11.77
1.56	11.7.78
2.00	14.11.77
2.11	7.12.77
2.14	18.7.78
2.17	27.7.78
2.24	6.12.77
2.24	19.7.78
2.39	6.3.78
2.46	20.7.78
2.54	20.6.78
4.01	15.11.77
5.38	17.5.78
7.22	20.3.78
12.58 pm	1.8.78
1978-79	
1.31	25.1.79
1.51	29.11.78
2.23	13.12.78
3.07	7.11.78
4.10	17.1.79
4.37	14.12.78
4.40	15.3.79
11.00	12.12.78
1979-80	

	Date
1.32	4.3.80
1.35	2.7.80
1.38	24.3.80
1.39	17.7.79
1.39	12.3.80
1.41	22.4.80
1.48	19.12.79
1.55	7.5.80
1.58	17.12.79
2.02	5.2.80
2.02	10.6.80
2.04	21.7.80
2.10	6.2.80
2.11	23.4.80
2.11	6.5.80
2.14	24.7.79
2.18	16.4.80
2.22	25.3.80
2.23	24.6.80
2.34	12.2.80
2.43	12.7.79
2.45	23.7.80
2.50	16.7.80
2.53	12.11.79
2.57	11.11.80
3.04	25.6.80
3.05	14.5.80
3.08	25.6.79
3.30	4.6.80
3.35	25.7.79
3.56	3.7.79
3.59	16.7.79
4.16	9.6.80
4.52	8.7.80
5.39	28.10.80
6.32	23.7.79
6.49	6.8.80
7.30	18.12.79
7.33	13.5.80
9.43	26.7.79
2.51 pm	4.8.80

Session and Time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1980-81	
1.31	14.1.81
1.35	10.12.80
1.36	14.4.81
1.37	26.10.81
1.51	8.12.80
1.54	21.5.81
1.54	27.7.81
1.56	12.5.81
2.05	3.12.80
2.07	21.1.81
2.07	8.4.81
2.18	16.6.81
2.22	28.7.81
2.43	8.7.81
2.47	23.3.81
2.50	30.6.81
2.59	22.7.81
3.14	13.7.81
3.58	30.7.81
4.02	14.7.81
4.07	18.2.81
4.53	15.7.81
6.31	11.12.80
8.42	23.7.81
9.51	6.7.81
10.32	17.12.80
10.39	8.6.81
3.30 pm	1.4.81
1981-82	

	Date
1.35	30.6.82
1.38	15.12.81
1.40	24.3.82
1.43	29.6.82
1.48	16.6.82
2.07	23.6.82
2.18	13.7.82
2.35	17.5.82
2.44	16.3.82
2.46	7.7.82
3.25	26.7.82
3.38	12.5.82
3.47	2.2.82
3.55	19.7.82
4.45	3.2.82
5.34	12.7.82
6.00	18.10.82
6.05	8.6.82
6.45	9.6.82
8.40	29.7.82
9.21	15.6.82
9.27	21.12.81
1982-83	
1.39	1.2.83
1.43	20.12.82
1.50	7.3.83
1.54	14.12.82
2.08	18.1.83
2.09	28.3.83
2.13	24.11.82
2.23	16.2.83
2.32	4.5.83
4.21	24.3.83
4.31	15.12.82
6.08	3.5.83
9.21	7.2.83

Session and time at which adjourned (am unless stated)

	Date
1983-84	
1·38	13.12.83
1·40	2.4.84
1.41	18.7.83
1.41	28.3.84
1.43	22.3.84
1.45	19.3.84
1.46	3.7.84
1.51	6.2.84
1.51	29.10.84
1.54	9.7.84
1.55	24.7.84
1.58	20.6.84
2.09	26.7.84
2.15	12.12.83
2.19	11.7.83
2.28	13.6.84
2.33	14.12.83
2.46	9.4.84
3.03	26.6.84
3.14	2.5.84
3.29	30.4.84
3.42	10.4.84
3.49	18.7.84
3.50	20.7.83
4.05	30.7.84
4.37	15.5.84
4.39	19.7.83
5.24	9.5.84
9.25	25.7.84
9.28	12.3.84
9.29	25.7.83
9.29	19.12.83
12.15 pm.	11.7.84
10.43 pm.	22.5.84

	Date
1984-85	
1.37	3.12.84
1.39	28.3.85
1.44	14.5.85
1.45	15.7.85
1.49	1.7.85
1.50	25.3.85
1.52	6.12.84
1.52	26.6.85
1.53	12.3.85
1.53	27.3.85
1.54	7.5.85
1.56	10.7.85
1.57	26.2.85
2.00	6.2.85
2.07	26.11.84
2.08	10.12.84
2.08	1.5.85
2.08	15.5.85
2.09	12.2.85
2.18	4.12.84
2.25	23.7.85
2.28	14.2.85
2.33	28.11.84
2.40	20.2.85
2.45	14.1.85
3.13	16.1.85
3.27	9.7.85
3.42	19.2.85
3.43	24.10.85
3.47	5.2.85
4.56	3.7.85
9.24	24.7.85
9.30	26.3.85
9.34	19.12.84
8.44 pm.	5.3.85
*1985-86**	
1.40	10.12.85
1.49	20.1.86
9.27	18.12.85

* To 31.1.86

Norman Shaw North Issue Office

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Lord Privy Seal (1) if he will consult hon. Members and their staff who have offices in the Norman Shaw buildings regarding the extension of opening hours of the Norman Shaw north issue office; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will refer the opening hours of the Norman Shaw north issue office to the Services Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Lord Privy Seal what steps he is taking to bring into line the opening hours of the Norman Shaw north issue office with the main basement Vote Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: I will ask the relevant Sub-Committee of the Services Committee to review this question. I am sure that the Sub-Committee will conduct consultations among those concerned before making its recommendations.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Lord Privy Seal why there is a delay of parliamentary papers being delivered to the Norman Shaw north issue office; what steps he is taking to alleviate the problem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: I am not aware of any general problem of delay in the delivery of parliamentary papers to the Norman Shaw issue office. Documents are sent between

the main Vote Office stores and Norman Shaw by van twice daily; and papers for issue during the day are taken over by hand between van deliveries. Papers of the day are avialable at 10 am when the issue office opens. If my hon. Friend has any particular complaint, I will ask the Deliverer of the Vote to investigate it.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Lord Privy Seal how many *(a)* temporary or part-time staff and *(b)* full-time staff are employed by (i) the Norman Shaw north issue office and (ii) the main basement Vote Office; and how this compares with 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Biffen: The Norman Shaw issue office is manned by two full-time staff, and has been since its inception in 1974. They are assisted from time to time by other Vote Office staff drawn from other sections based in Norman Shaw. The main basement Vote Office has a rotating pattern of duties which involve:

24 part-time staff between 7.30 am and 10 pm daily.
8 full-time staff at varying times between 7.30 am and the rising of the House.

There are never more than three or fewer than two employed in the main store on duties equivalent to those in the Norman Shaw issue office.

Overall staff complement figures for the Vote Office are as follows:

	Permanent	*Temporary*
1974*	16	10
1979	18	19
1986†	19	25

* Norman Shaw Issue Office opened in 1974.
† New system for early-morning delivery within three miles radius of Westminster instituted in 1985.

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Lord Privy Seal what are the opening hours during sitting days of *(a)* the Norman Shaw north issue office and *(b)* the main basement Vote Office; and how this compares with 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Biffen: The opening hours of the Norman Shaw issue office on sitting days are 10 am to 6 pm. These hours have been the same since the office opened in 1974. The opening hours of the main basement Vote Office on sitting days have remained unchanged since 1842, namely 7.30 am to the rising of the House.

Irish Parliament ("Official Report")

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will seek to make available in the Vote Offices copies of the *Official Report* of debates in the Irish Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The *Official Report* of debates in both Houses of the Irish Parliament is available to hon. Members in the Library. I do not consider that there is sufficient evidence of demand to justify regular stocks being held in the Vote Office.

"Official Report"

Mr. Garrett asked the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many people are on the staff of the *Official Report;* how many are qualified; what is the authorised staff level; and what was the rate of staff turnover during the past 12 months.

Mr. Beith: On 10 February there were 77 staff, including two part-time, in the Department of the *Official Report*. Of this number 17 were under training and 2½ were on unpaid leave. The authorised staff level is 78. In the 12 months to 9 February 1986, eight staff left the Department.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Release Scheme

Mr. Harvey asked the Paymaster General what estimates he has of the gross and net cost of extending the job release scheme to *(a)* those aged 60 years and *(b)* those aged 55 years.

Mr. Lang: Estimates for lowering the job release scheme age of eligibility to 60 were published in the Employment Committee's minutes of evidence of Wednesday 3 July 1985 on special employment measures (Cmnd. 487-i, questions 3 and 8, pages 9 and 12); and also in paragraph 3.36 and table 13 of the paper attached to the memorandum submitted to the Committee by Mr. Gavyn Davies, referred to in the minutes of evidence for Wednesday 10 July (Cmnd 487-ii, page 37). I am not aware of estimates for lowering the age to 55 years.

Industrial Wages

Mr. Wigley asked the Paymaster General if he will publish his most recent figures for the average industrial wage for *(a)* men and *(b)* women.

Mr. Lang: The latest available information on the average gross weekly earnings of full-time adult employees in manufacturing industries, distinguishing males and females, relates to April 1985 and is published in Table 5.6 of *Labour Market Data* in the December 1985 issue of Employment Gazette, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Graduates (Earnings)

Mr. Deakins asked the Paymaster General what information he has available to him about the value of postgraduate qualifications in terms of additional earnings for those holding such qualifications.

Mr. Lang: There is very little information available on the salaries of people with postgraduate qualifications. A number of professional institutes in science and technology carry out salary surveys of their members which include a question on postgraduate qualifications. The numbers involved are small and cannot be used to draw general conclusions about the returns to postgraduate qualifications even in the disciplines concerned. The surveys show that professional institute members with master's degrees earn salaries similar to those of their colleagues with first degrees. Members with doctorates tend to earn between 10 per cent. and 40 per cent. more than those in the same age groups with first degrees. The differences are greater for members of the Institute of Biology and the Institutions of Civil Engineers and least for members of the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Institution of Geologists.

Construction Industry

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Paymaster General if he will estimate how many construction workers were unemployed in Great Britain in 1975, 1980 and 1985 or the nearest available years.

Mr. Lang: In May 1975 there were 148,568 unemployed registrants at jobcentres in Great Britain whose previous employment had been in the construction industry, and the corresponding number in May 1980 was 189,554. Industrial analysis of unemployment has not been available since the change in the basis of the unemployment count in October 1982.

Some information on unemployment by industry continues to be available from the annual labour force survey, although these results are not directly comparable with those previously available from the monthly unemployment count. According to the 1984 labour force survey, in the spring of that year there were an estimated 233,000 persons unemployed in Great Britain whose most recent job in the last three years was in the construction industry.

Jobcentres (Registers)

Mr. Watts asked the Paymaster General, pursuant to the answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *348*, if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of people registered at jobcentres located within the travel-to-work areas referred to.

Mr. Lang: The following table gives the numbers of jobseekers who, on 3 January 1986, were registered at jobcentres which closely relate to those travel-to-work areas with an unemployment rate of 8 per cent. or less. It is not necessary to register for employment in order to use the jobcentre, nor should it be assumed that these figures represent all the jobseekers in the areas who are actively looking for work.

Travel-to-work area and jobcentre	*Number of persons registered as at 3 January 1986*
Winchester and Eastleigh	
Winchester	436
Eastleigh	552
Crawley	
Crawley	162
Dorking	116
East Grinstead	171
Garwick	183
Haywards Heath	75
Horsham	132
Redhill	203
Clitheroe	
Clitheroe	471
Aylesbury and Wycombe	
Aylesbury	370
Chesham	54
High Wycombe	137
Basingstoke and Alton	
Basingstoke	349
Alton	219
Aberdeen	
Aberdeen	1,303
Shetland Isles	
Lerwick	132
Cambridge	
Cambridge	544
Ely	65
Royston	124
Saffron Waldon	194
Guildford and Aldershot	
Guildford*	421
Camberley*	357
Slough	
Bracknell	67
Maidenhead	51
Slough	210
Windsor	62
Tunbridge Wells	
Edenbridge	138
Sevenoaks	125
Tonbridge	404
Tunbridge Wells	357
Bury St. Edmunds	
Bury St. Edmunds	1,359
Heathrow	
Acton	172
Chiswick	281
Ealing	180
Feltham	66
Hayes	22
Hounslow	917
Kingston	468
Richmond	339
Ruislip	270
Southall	197
Twickenham	172
Uxbridge	142
West Drayton	58
Oxford	
Abingdon	117
Didcot	513
Oxford*	836
Witney	148
Malton	
Malton	150
Reading	
Reading	1,120
Wokingham	93

* In the Guildford and Aldershot area, registrations at the Aldershot, Farnborough, Farnham and Fleet jobcentres are held centrally at Camberley. Registrations from Godalming jobcentre are held at Guildford, and registration for Liphook are held at Havant jobcentre which is in the Portsmouth travel-to-work area.

Registrations at the Wantage and Wallingford jobcentres are held centrally at Oxford.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Budget

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the EEC budget for 1986 finally agreed by the Council balances anticipated expenditure and anticipated income; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Both the draft budget, as amended by the Council at the Second Reading, and the budget as adopted by the European Parliament, were in balance.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Enterprise Ulster

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes are proposed in the structure and operations of Enterprise Ulster.

Dr. Boyson: I am currently consulting the board of Enterprise Ulster and other interested organisations about the possibility that its functions might be carried out more economically by other means. No decision about its future will be taken until I have received, and given careful consideration to, the views of those consulted.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has about the attitude adopted by representatives of the nationalist community and the Roman Catholic Church towards the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr. Tom King [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 February 1986, c. *271*]: When the Anglo-Irish agreement was debated in this House on 26 November the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) expressed full and unqualified support for the police force in impartially seeking out anybody who commits a crime in Northern Ireland. I welcome this support. I am also aware of various other statements by nationalists and Roman Catholic clergymen about the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment made since the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Select Committees (Reports)

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the reports from departmental Select Committees made since 1979 are now out of print; what percentage of these are out of print because demand exceeded supply; what percentage because stocks have been destroyed; and what percentage for any other reason.

Mr. Brooke: The precise information requested could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. However, reports of departmental Select Committees are allowed to go out of print only when stocks are exhausted and current demand does not warrant a reprint.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Meacher asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current distribution of mortgage interest tax relief by income bands under £5,000 a year, £5,000 to £10,000, £10,000 to £15,000, £15,000 to £20,000, £20,000 to £25,000, £25,000 to £30,000, £30,000 to £40,000, £40,000 to £50,000 and over £50,000; what is the number of taxpayers in each income band receiving this relief; what is the total relief per mortgagor in pound millions and as a percentage; and what is the average relief per mortgagor in each income band.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what view the Inland Revenue takes on future reinsurance at Lloyd's for the purposes of the payment of tax.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 February 1986]: Reinsurance is dealt with in accordance with the normal income tax principles which apply to payments and provisions for future liabilities of traders.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audio Tape (Levy)

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from musicians on the proposal to put a levy on blank tape.

Mr. Pattie: A number of responses to the Green Paper "The Recording and Rental of Audio and Video Copyright Material" (Cmnd. 9445) were received from organisations whose membership includes musicians. These representations were generally in favour of a levy. In recent correspondence, the Musicians' Union has pressed the case for a levy.

Price Marking Order

Sir John Page asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in view of the misleading bargain offers criticised in case report 129 of the Advertising Standards Authority dated 15 January, he will make a statement on the operation of the Price Marking (Bargain Offers) Order 1979.

Mr. Howard: I recognise the limitations of this order and the Government have already declared their intention to introduce replacement legislation as soon as parliamentary time is available.

As indicated in the statement to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher) on 4 March last year, the proposed legislation will include provisions for a general prohibition on misleading price indications, with the relevant supporting detail being provided in a statutory code of practice. Consultations with representatives of the trade, enforcement authorities and consumer organisations are currently taking place on the draft of a code for this purpose which includes provisions covering the type of practice on bargain offers criticised in the Advertising Standards Authority's case report 129.

Man-made Fibres

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what has been the volume and value of man-made fibre imports in each of the last five years from *(a)* other member countries of the European Economic Community, *(b)* non-European Economic Community European countries and *(c)* the United States of America; and how these figures compare with United Kingdom exports of such products to each of those countries in each of those years;

(2) what has been the volume and value of man-made fibre exports in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the scale of the reductions in total capacity of the United Kingdom man-made fibre industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the volume of man-made fibre deliveries and production which was achieved in the United Kingdom during the last year for which figures are available; and how these figures compare with those for the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is as follows:

*Man-made Fibres**

(000 tonnes)

	Production	*Deliveries*
1976	618·4	622·5
1977	551·8	580·4
1978	607·1	608·6
1979	596·2	590·0
1980	449·8	474·3
1981	404·7	409·2
1982	333·6	336·2
1983	389·3	395·4
1984	383·4	376·4
1985	330·2	340·9

* Total of continuous filament yarn and staple tow and tops.
Source: Man-made Fibres Producers' Committee.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the volume of man-made fibre deliveries and production which was achieved in the United Kingdom during the latest quarter for which figures are available; and how these figures compare with those for the same quarter in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The information is as follows:

*Man-made Fibres**

(000 tonnes)
(not seasonally adjusted)

	Production	*Deliveries*
1976 Q4	160·7	173·8
1977 Q4	115·1	133·1
1978 Q4	159·3	160·0
1979 Q4	147·6	142·7
1980 Q4	101·4	103·6
1981 Q4	99·1	100·3
1982 Q4	86·6	89·8
1983 Q4	97·3	94·7
1984 Q4	90·8	89·8
1985 Q4	86·9	76·8

* Total of continuous filament yarn and staple tow and tops.
Source: Man-Made Fibres Producers' Committee.

Westland plc

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what authority the former Secretary of State acted in giving authority on 6 January for the disclosure of parts of the Solicitor-General's letter of 6 January to the then Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Channon: The circumstances have been fully set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her statement on 23 January and in the debate on 27 January.

Chocolate Eggs (Toys)

Mr. McKay asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the sale of small plastic toys contained in chocolate eggs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have no plans to prohibit the supply of such products. As my predecessor the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher) said on 16 July last year at column *88* in reply to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) there are any number of small objects which could cause the death of a child by choking. I can only add that apart from featuring prominent labels warning parents to keep small toys away from young children, suppliers are investigating ways of making plastic toys detectable by X-ray if swallowed.

Cotton Textiles

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the volume and value of cotton textile imports in each of the last five years from *(a)* other member countries of the European Economic Community, *(b)* non-European European Economic Community countries and *(c)* the United States of America; and how these figures compare with United Kingdom exports of such products to each of those countries in each of those years.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the volume of cotton textiles deliveries and production which was achieved in the United Kingdom during the latest quarter for which figures are available; and how these figures compare with those for the same quarter in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The available information is as follows:

Textiles production on cotton system
(not seasonally adjusted)

	Spinning and doubling of yarn *(000 tonnes)*	*Cloth production* *(million linear metres)*	*Deliveries of yarn by spinners, waste spinners and doublers (000 tonnes)*
1976 Q4	60·5	219·3	55·5
1977 Q4	54·7	218·1	50·5
1978 Q4	54·6	217·1	50·1
1979 Q4	52·9	208·4	46·5
1980 Q4	32·7	145·9	32·6
1981 Q4	31·7	136·3	29·5
1982 Q4	28·9	123·4	27·2
1983 Q4	30·5	128·0	27·7
1984 Q4	29·6	133·1	27·3
1985 Q4	31·0	138·3	28·7

Source: Textile Statistics Bureau.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the volume of cotton textile deliveries and production which was achieved in the United Kingdom during the latest year for which figures are available; and how these figures compare with those for the last 10 years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The available information is as follows:

Textiles Production on Cotton System

	Spinning and doubling of yarn (000 tonnes)	*Cloth production* Million linear metres)	*Deliveries of yarn by spinners, waste spinners and doublers* (000 tonnes)
1976	232·7	868·3	216·6
1977	226·9	866·9	207·2
1978	210·4	841·0	194·0
1979	206·3	832·3	187·3
1980	160·0	665·3	149·6
1981	123·4	551·1	117·2
1982	118·5	511·7	112·4
1983	117·0	483·5	110·3
1984	114·1	504·2	107·7
1985	118·2	529·2	112·6

Source: Textile Statistics Bureau.

Accident Statistics (Glass)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many accidents have been reported where injury has been caused by either (1) people falling through or (2) coming into contact with (i) glass doors, (ii) glass panelling and (iii) windows internal and external and the glass breaking, in whole or part, in the years 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 to the latest date available.

Mr. Howard [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 February 1986, c. *521*]: The information is not available in exactly the form requested. The only detailed information readily available covers accidents in and around the home. The home accident surveillance system collects information on non-fatal home accidents from a rolling sample of 20 hospitals in England and Wales. Analysis of the cases reported by these 20 hospitals yields the following figures:

	Home accidents recording involving			*Total non-fatal home accidents (of all types) recorded in HASS*
	**Glass doors*	*Glass windows*	*Other glass panes*	
1980	1,045	858	123	76,245
1981	1,155	980	153	87,900
1982	901	879	98	77,071
1983	1,246	1,069	202	98,878
1984	1,431	1,171	264	110,254
1985†	Figures available shortly			115,000

* Excluding cupboards.
† Provisional.

It is not known whether all these accidents involved the glass itself, nor whether the glass actually broke. However a more detailed analysis of the data for 1984 identified 2,001 cases in the HASS sample in which glass was directly involved (1,013 doors, 728 windows and 260 other panes). This means that at least 27,000 patients were treated in hospitals nationally. Over 90 per cent. of these injuries were cuts, suggesting that the glass did actually break; 23 per cent. were the results of falls.

TRANSPORT

Bourton and Zeals Bypass

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the detailed programme for implementation of the Bourton and Zeals bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Draft orders under the provisions of the Highways Act 1980 are to be published by Easter. We then have to allow time for the submission and consideration of objections and the holding of a public inquiry should one prove to be necessary. It is unlikely that we shall be able to reach this stage before the end of the year. Assuming a successful outcome to the public inquiry it should be possible to announce a final decision about the end of 1987. Final detailed design, preparation of contract documents and procedures for obtaining tenders are expected to take a further 12 months which means that work should start either late 1988 or early 1989. These timings would be strongly dependent upon there being no modifications to the orders following the public inquiry.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will allow access to records of pesticides already approved under the provisions of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

Mrs. Fenner: We are proposing to make available to the public a full evaluation of each pesticide as soon as it receives provisional or full approval or undergoes a review under the statutory arrangements for pesticide approvals which are to be introduced under the Act. We also propose to consider, on a case-by-case basis, requests for access to the study reports submitted under the new arrangements, and to grant access where a request is justified in scientific terms. Details of these proposals are set out in the Consultative Document "Pesticides: Implementing Part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985" which is in the Library.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the operation of his Department's stated goal of re-examining every approved pesticide every 10 years.

Mrs. Fenner: We are still consulting interested parties on the implementation of part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, including the suggestion that all formulated products should be subjected as a matter of course to full scientific reviews at 10-yearly intervals from the date of their first commercial approval. A 10-year interval between reviews was suggested in the consultative document in the light of the experiences of registration authorities overseas; we will be examining this, and the proposals for review generally, in the light of all the comments received during the consultation period.

Pesticide 2, 4, 5-T

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish in the *Official Report* the tonnage of the weedkiller 2, 4, 5-T imported into the United Kingdom in each month since January 1983.

Mrs. Fenner: The tonnage of 2, 4, 5-T imported into the United Kingdom in each month since January 1983 is as follows:

Year	*Tonnes*
1983	
January	123·5
February	Nil
March	54
April	18
May	54
June	Nil
July	Nil
August	7·5
September	Nil
October	25
November	Nil
December	18
1984	
January - December	Nil
1985	
January-November	Nil

Figures for December 1985-January 1986 are not yet available.

Food Standards Committees (Official Secrets Act)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will cease to require members of committees concerned with food standards to sign the Official Secrets Act.

Mrs. Fenner: Members of the Food Advisory Committee and the Committee on Toxicity are not required to sign any such declarations. In common with any person with access to official information they are subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act and where appropriate therefore they are reminded of the need to observe commercial confidentiality.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Raoul Wallenberg

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* oral questions and *(b)* written questions have been addressed to his Department about Raoul Wallenberg; how many received answers on the day for which they were set down; and how many received holding replies, for each Session since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: Details, from our own records, which have been cross-checked with the parliamentary on-line information system, are as follows:

Parliamentary Questions on Raoul Wallenberg

Session	*Oral questions*	*Written questions*	*Total*
1979-80 (15.5.79-13.11.80)	0	0	0
1980-81 (20.11.80-30.10.81)	1	0	1
1981-82 (4.11.81-28.10.82)	0	0	0
1982-83 (3.11.82-13.5.83)	0	1	1
1983-84 15.6.83-31.10.84)	0	1	1
1984-85 (6.11.84-30.10.85)	1	9	10
1985-86 (6.11.85-to date)	0	10	10

All questions were answered on the specified day. No holding replies were given.

Draft Single European Act

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to publish a White Paper or other document stating the implications of and Government response to the draft Single European Act dated 27 January 1986.

Mr. Renton: The Single European Act will be published as a Command Paper following signature by all member states. We intend subsequently to introduce a Bill to make the necessary changes to the European Communities Act 1972. There will be an opportunity for full discussion of the implications of the Single European Act during the passage of the Bill.

Elena Gurevich

Mr. White asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library as much information as is in his possession about Elena Gurevich of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Case of Elena Gurevich and her family is known to us although our information is sketchy. Miss Gurevich, who was born in 1964, has been among those not allowed to leave the Soviet Union since 1974 when her parents submitted their first visa application to emigrate to Israel. This was rejected on the grounds that Mrs. Gurevicha had had access to classified information as a messenger in an institute which tracked sputniks. All subsequent visa applications have been similarly turned down.

Soviet Dissidents

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of the Soviet dissidents whose cases his Department has raised with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' authorities in the past 12 months; and how many of them are Jewish.

Mr. Renton: The following human rights cases were raised with the Soviet authorities at both official and ministerial level in the course of 1985:

Dr. Andrei Sakharov (and Mrs. Bonner Sakharov)
Anatoly Shcharansky
Yuri Orlov
Iosif Begun
Nikolai Baturin
Vladimir Gershuni
Father Gleb Yakunin
Dr. Anatoly Koryagin
Raoul Wallenberg
Oksana Meshko
Mart Niklus
Ida Nudel
Irina Ratushinskaya
Roald Zelichenok

A number of these cases were raised in the margins of the CSCE Ottawa experts' meeting on human rights. Five of the individuals are Soviet Jews.

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he uses in deciding to make representations to the Soviet Government with regard to individual Soviet dissidents.

Mr. Renton: It is not possible in contacts with the Soviet leadership to raise more than a few of the many hundreds of individual cases brought to out attention. Those we do raise are chosen both because they are compelling in themselves, and to indicate our concern about various categories of human rights abuse and in some cases, persecution of particular national and religious groups. In making any selection we also give weight to representations from hon. Members and from the general public.

ENVIRONMENT

London Borough of Newham

Mr. Thornton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require the Audit Commission to direct an extraordinary audit of the accounts of the direct labour organisation of the London borough of Newham, as they relate to the Little Ilford youth centre and the rebuilding of the Winor primary school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend is aware of and concerned about the situation at Newham. However, in the first instance it is for the Audit Commission to decide whether to direct the auditor to hold an extraordinary audit. I am sure that if my hon. Friend contacted the Audit Commission with details it would be pleased to look into the matter.

Wimbledon Town Centre

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about Merton council's proposed agreement with Speyhawk plc for the redevelopment of Wimbledon town centre; and what reply he has given.

Mr. Tracey: The Department has received two letters referring to an agreement between Merton London borough council and Speyhawk plc for the development of the Wimbledon town hall site. As the agreement relates to planning applications for the site, which may come before my right hon. Friend, any comment by him could be held to be prejudicial, and he has simply taken note of the representations.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings he has had recently with Mr. David Lea of the Trades Union Congress committee on nuclear waste; what views were put to him there on disposal of nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall answer this question shortly.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites were on the list sent to him by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive for possible investigation for the disposal of low level, short and intermediate level nuclear waste.

Mr. Waldegrave: The proposals that the chairman of UK NIREX Ltd. sent to my right hon. Fried on 8 January are confidential. They are currently being considered.

Liverpool (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Liverpool of Lord Elton, Minister of State.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My noble Friend visited Merseyside as part of a series of visits he is making to review progress on abolition implementation. He met representatives of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, the voluntary sector, the county branch of NALGO, the residuary body, and the co-ordinating committee, as well as members of the media. He found the visit informative and useful.

Building Regulation Advisory Service

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations concerning the issuing of letters of assessment from the Building Regulation Advisory Service; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly

Building Regulations

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are the current United Kingdom building regulations regarding roof insulation standards; and what information he has as to how these compare with *(a)* Denmark, *(b)* Sweden, *(c)* Finland, *(d)* Norway, *(e)* West Germany, *(f)* Austria and *(g)* France, respectively;

(2) what are the current United Kingdom building regulations regarding wall insulation standards; and what information he has as to how these compare with *(a)* Norway, *(b)* Finland, *(c)* Sweden, *(d)* Denmark, *(e)* France and *(f)* West Germany, respectively;

(3) what are the current United Kingdom building regulations regarding floor insulation standards; and what information he has as to how these compare with *(a)* Finland, *(b)* Norway, *(c)* Denmark, *(d)* Sweden, *(e)* West Germany, *(f)* Austria, *(g)* Eire, *(h)* the Netherlands, *(i)* Switzerland, *(j)* France, *(k)* Spain and *(l)* Greece, respectively.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 February 1986, c. *511*]: Information on the thermal insulation standards for the roof, walls and floors of new dwellings in various countries is included in the following table. In comparing standards, account should be taken of the internal temperatures and external weather conditions found in different countries.

The measure of heat loss through the roof/wall/floor (Watts per metre squared degrees celcius)

Country	*Roof*	*Wall*	*Floor*
United Kingdom*	0·35	0·6	†(0·6)
Austria	0·30	0·7–0·5	0·6–0·43
Denmark	0·20	0·40	0·30
Republic of Ireland	0·4	0·6	0·6
Finland			
Heavy construction	0·29	0·35	0·29
Light construction	0·23	0·29	0·23
France	‡(0·32)	‡(0·54)	‡(1·0)
West Germany	‖(0·30)	‖1·2	‖(0·55)
Greece	0·5	‖1·9	3·0–0·5
Italy	‡(0·5)	‡(0·6)	None
Netherlands	‡(0·68)	‡(0·68)	‡(0·68)
Norway	0·23	¶0·35	¶0·23
		•0·25	•0·3
Spain	‡(1·4–0·7)	‡(1·8–1·4)	‡(1·0–0·7)
Sweden	0·2	0·3	0·3
Switzerland	■	■	■

* The requirements are similar in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
† For intermediate floors exposed on underside.
‡ Derived from requirement for total thermal loss of building as a whole in selected regions.
‖ Average for walls and windows.
¶ With triple glazing.
• With double glazing.
■ No mandatory requirements.

Cathedrals

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give full details of the listed building status, together with dates of listing of all the cathedrals of the Church of England.

Mr. Tracey [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 February 1986, c. *282*]: The schedule of listed buildings is as follows. I am also placing copies of my Department's "Guide to the legislation on the listing of Historic Buildings in England" in the Library of both Houses.

Church of England Cathedrals in Provinces of Canterbury and York (taken from the Church of England Yearbook 1985)

Diocese	*Cathedral*	*Date first listed*	*Current grade*
Bath and Wells	Cathedral Church of St. Andrew in Wells	12.11.53	A
Birmingham	Cathedral Church of St. Philip	25.4.52	I
Blackburn	Cathedral Church of St. Mary the Virgin	28.11.51	B
Bradford	Cathedral Church of St. Peter	4.9.52	I
Bristol	Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity	8.1.59	A
Canterbury	Cathedral Church of Christ	3.12.49	A
Carlisle	Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity	1.6.49	A
Chelmsford	Cathedral Church of St. Mary the Virgin, St. Peter and St. Cedd	20.5.49	B
Chester	Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary	28.7.55	A
Chichester	Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity	5.7.50	A
Coventry	Cathedral Church of St. Michael†	5.2.55	A
Derby	Cathedral Church of All Saints	20.6.52	A
Durham	Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Mary the Virgin	6.5.52	A
Ely	Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity	23.9.50	A
Exeter	Cathedral Church of St. Peter	29.1.53	A
Gloucester	Cathedral Church of St. Peter and the Holy and Indivisible Trinity	23.1.52	A
Guildford	Cathedral Church of the Holy Spirit	16.1.81	II
Hereford	Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Ethelbert	10.6.52	A
Leicester	Cathedral Church of St. Martin	5.1.50	C
Lichfield	Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Chad	5.2.52	I
Lincoln	Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary	8.10.53	A
Liverpool	Cathedral Church of Christ	28.6.52	I
London	Cathedral Church of St. Paul‡	4.1.50	A
Manchester	Cathedral and Collegiate Church of St. Mary, St. Denys and St. George	25.1.52	A
Newcastle	Cathedral Church of St. Nicholas	14.6.54	A
Norwich	Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity	26.2.54	A
Oxford	Cathedral Church of Christ	12.1.54	A
Peterborough	Cathedral Church of St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Andrew	7.2.52	A
Portsmouth	Cathedral Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury	10.1.53	A
Ripon	Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Wilfrid	27.5.49	I
Rochester	Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary	24.10.50	A
St. Albans	Cathedral and Abbey Church of St. Alban	8.5.50	A
St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich	Cathedral Church of St. James, Bury St. Edmunds	7.8.52	A
Salisbury	Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary	28.2.52	A
Sheffield	Cathedral Church of St. Peter and St. Paul	1.5.52	A
Southwark	Cathedral and Collegiate Church of St. Saviour and St. Mary Overie	2.3.50	A
Southwell (Nottinghamshire)	Cathedral and Collegiate Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary	11.8.61	A
Truro	Cathedral Church of St. Mary	29.12.50	A
Wakefield	Cathedral Church of All Saints	14.7.53	A
Winchester	Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Swithun	24.3.50	A

Diocese	*Cathedral*	*Date first listed*	*Current grade*
Windsor	St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle‖	—	—
Worcester	Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary	22.5.54	A
York	Cathedral Church of St. Peter	14.6.54	I

Notes: The dates given are the dates when the cathedrals were statutorily listed. The grades are explained in paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7 of the enclosed leaflet.

* The Diocese of Sodor and Man has a cathedral church but is excluded because the Secretary of State is not responsible for listing on the Isle of Man. The diocese of Europe is also excluded.

† The lising applies to the ruined cathedral church.

‡ Westminster Abbey is not included as it is not a cathedral.

‖ St. George's Chapel has cathedral status but there is no diocese. The chapel is *provisionally* listed grade I as this is the grade given to Windsor Castle and all the buildings within the walls. Windsor Castle is not *statutorily* listed at present but will be when Windsor is resurveyed again in the near future.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Disabled Children

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the approximate number of families with a disabled child at the latest available date;

(2) what is the estimated average amount of extra money spent per week by a family with a disabled child.

Mr. Newton: The information requested is not available centrally. Information on numbers of disabled persons by sex and age receiving attendance allowance and mobility allowance at year end are published in Tables 14.30, 15.30 and 15.31 of "Social Security Statistics 1984", copies of which have been placed in the Library.

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is undertaking on behalf of the Department a national survey of people, including children, with significant disabilities to obtain up-to-date and comprehensive information about their numbers, circumstances and needs. The results are expected to be published in 1988.

Mr. Kevin McHugh

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make the ex gratia payment requested on behalf of Mr. Kevin McHugh, of 39 Harland road, Tranmere, Birkenhead, on the ground that the local office, although aware of his children's enemesis, had failed to consider or arrange for extra help with laundry costs and so on, which request was made in January 1984 and referred to his headquarters in December 1984.

Mr. Major: Mr. McHugh has received substantial arrears of supplementary benefit for additional requirements in respect of his children. The arrears were limited by the independent adjudication authorities to 52 weeks before the date of request for a review in accordance with the law. This is in line with the provisions for national insurance benefits. The relevant law was then regulation 4 of the Supplementary Benefit (Determination of Questions) Regulations 1980 and is now regulation 87 of the Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1984. I regret that the referral of Mr. McHugh's subsequent request for an ex-gratia payment for arrears beyond 52 weeks was overlooked. An ex-gratia payment, however, cannot be given because to do so in this and similar cases would undermine the decisions of the adjudication authorities and circumvent the intention of the law. However, I understand Mr. McHugh has now appealed to a social security appeal tribunal. Whether such an appeal is heard is a matter of discretion for the appeal tribunal chairman. Mr. McHugh is however entitled to compensation of over £25 on the arrears which have been paid and this will be paid to him shortly.

Roho Cushions

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many cushions of the Roho type were purchased by his Department in 1983; and what is the average cost of such a cushion;

(2) if his Department will now purchase an additional supply of cushions of the Roho type to be made available to disabled patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tony Newton: Efficiency savings from the wheelchair service enabled the Department exceptionally to buy 725 Roho cushions in 1983. Prices paid by the Department to individual suppliers are subject to commercial confidentiality. We are considering whether any further purchase would be justified in the context of demands on the wheelchair service as a whole.

Family Income Supplement

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to in how many two-parent families, currently receiving family income supplement, the mother is working 24 hours or more a week; and what is his estimate of the number of two-parent families who will receive family credit in which the mother will be working 24 hours or more a week.

Mr. Newton: It is estimated that of the 116,000 two-parent families receiving family income supplement at the end of October 1985, 4,000 mothers were working full-time (30 hours or more weekly) and 9,000 mothers part-time. A breakdown at 24 hours is not available. We estimate, in the basis of the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691) that the number of two-parent families who will receive family credit in which the mother will be working 24 hours or more a week would be in the range of 15,000 to 25,000.

Hypothermia

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people over the age of 65 years died of hypothermia in the first three months of 1985 and the first three months of 1984 respectively.

Mr. Whitney: The numbers of deaths with a mention of hypothermia on the death certificate, regardless of whether it appeared as the underlying cause of death, of persons aged 65 years and over, registered in England and Wales in the first three months of 1984 and 1985 were 255 and 450 respectively.

Aids

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what specific guidance has been given to dentists treating patients suffering from acquired immune deficiency syndrome; and what steps are being taken to ensure that acquired immune deficiency syndrome sufferers are not being denied treatment.

Mr. Hayhoe: Patients known to be suffering from acquired immune deficiency syndrome will normally be referred to the hospital dental service for dental treatment. My Department is not aware of any case where such patients have been denied treatment. Dentists were provided with the report of the expert group on hepatitis in dentistry (1979 HMSO) and I am advised that the precautions recommended in that report in respect of the treatment of all patients would be effective in controlling cross infection from the AIDS virus.

The Department will shortly be issuing guidance to all dentists on the treatment of patients who are HTLV III antibody positive.

Dementia

Mr. Macfarlane asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much funding is available for research in Alzheimer's disease in 1986-87; and what funds are available for research into the problems of senile dementia.

Mr. Whitney: The main Government-funded body carrying out research in this field is the Medical Research Council from its annual grant-in-aid from the science Vote of the Department of Education and Science. Under these arrangements the council is funding research into Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia. The Department also spends some £12 million a year on research into health and social services. Research projects are chosen to meet the needs seen in the various services, though it is true that there is much competition for the funds available, from researchers with proposals which are of good quality. At present three studies are being supported into the problems of the elderly mentally infirm, including those with severe dementia, at a cost of some £140,000 a year.

Board and Lodging Charges

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many young persons have been subject to the board and lodging charges limit each month since April 1985, broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* sex, *(c)* application of either two, four, or eight-week rule, and *(d)* exemption categories.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 29 October 1985 at columns *439-442* for the information drawn from special returns submitted by local offices on the number of claimants whose claims were assessed between April and July 1985. An age breakdown of those claimants who were aged under 26 is set out in the table. Similar special returns have not been maintained for later periods. The collected data do not distinguish cases according to sex or the category of exemption given.

Ordinary boarders aged under 26
Cases affected between 29 April and 30 July 1985

Age	*Thousands*
16-17	9·5
18-20	27·0
21-24	23·5
25	3·5
	*64·0

* Rounding prevents exact sum.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the number of staff serving in social security offices each year since 1979; what has been the average work load each year in the number of cases dealt with by each of them; how many staff each undertook home visits; how many home visits they made; and how many welfare visits each member of the visiting staff made on average each year.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Health Authorities (Efficiency Savings)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out the efficiency savings in expenditure achieved by each district health authority for each year since 1979.

Mr. Hayhoe: The information available centrally relates only to efficiency savings made by regional health authorities from 1981-82 onwards. Details are shown in the table. Regional health authorities plan to achieve cost improvements totalling more than £150 million in 1985-86.

Efficiency savings

£ million

Regional Health Authority	**1981-82*	**1982-83*	*†1983-84*	*‡1984-85*
Northern	1·2	2·1	2·7	4·0
Yorkshire	0·6	2·0	3·1	7·1
Trent	1·5	2·1	3·7	8·0
East Anglian	0·8	0·6	1·6	3·3
North West Thames	1·2	1·8	3·3	10·6
North East Thames	1·5	4·1	4·2	11·7
South East Thames	2·1	3·0	3·6	14·0
South West Thames	1·2	1·2	2·8	6·9
Wessex	0·2	1·3	2·2	4·2
Oxford	0·2	0·6	1·8	3·7
South Western	1·0	1·0	2·7	4·7
West Midlands	1·3	1·4	4·2	13·5
Mersey	1·1	2·0	2·3	7·6
North Western	1·3	2·3	3·8	7·5
Total	15·2	25·5	42·0	106·8

* Cash savings reported by regions.

† In 1983-84, regional health authorities were expected to achieve the efficiency savings shown, equivalent to some 0·5 per cent. of their cash allocations, but detailed returns on their achievements were not requested.

‡ From 1984-85, regional health authorities have been required to include planned cost improvements in their short term programmes and to report on their achievements. The table shows the cost improvements achieved.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people dissatisfied with decisions on their claims for single payments of supplementary benefit for extra fuel costs arising from exceptionally severe weather prior to the October decision of the Social Security Commissioners have applied for review by adjudication officers; and how many have received payment as a result.

Mr. Newton: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Disabled Persons Bill (Consultation Paper)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he has sent, or will be sending, copies of his Department's consultation paper on the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill to all Members of Parliament;

(2) to how many organisations of, and for, disabled people his Department's consultation paper on the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill has been sent; and what basis for selection was used;

(3) if he will be sending copies of his Department's consultation paper on the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill to the Greater London Association for the Disabled and the Manchester disability forum.

Mr. Hayhoe: Copies of the Department's consultation paper have been sent to 24 major national organisations concerned with disability issues, as well as to local authority associations and appropriate professional bodies. Copies have also been placed in the Library. As I made clear when the document was issued, the Department will send a copy on request to any other person or organisation who wishes to have one.

NHS (Linen and Uniforms)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the cost incurred by the National Health Service in each of the last four years for the purchase of *(a)* linen and *(b)* uniforms.

Mr. Hayhoe: The summarised accounts of regional and district health authorities in England together with those for the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals show expenditure as follows:

	Bedding and linen £ million	*Staff uniforms and clothing £ million*
1981-82	42·4	24·7
1982-83	44·6	25·1
1983-84	43·5	24·5
1984-85	47·4	26·5

Water Rates (Benefits)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the implications for the future type and scale of benefits available to assist low income families with the payment of water rates of the proposed legislation to privatise water authorities.

Mr. Newton: The Government believe that their proposals for the privatisation of the water industry will lead to an improved and more efficient service for all consumers, including low income households. Expenditure on water rates will be taken into account in setting benefit rates for the new income support scheme proposed in the White Paper "Reform of Social Security: Programme for Action" (Cmnd 9691).

Cancer

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average annual figure for cases of lymphatic cancer and leukaemia among people under 25 years of age in the parishes of Burghfield and Aldermaston in Berkshire expressed *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a rate of incidence; whether there are demographic or other factors which would account for any divergence from national average figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Data from the registration of newly diagnosed cases of cancers from 1961 are not readily identifiable at the parish level. However the table shows available information for the pre-1974 local authority area of Bradfield rural district which includes Burghfield and Aldermaston.

Registrations of newly diagnosed cases of cancer; area of usual residence Bradfield RD, 1961-1980, Persons aged 0-24 years, Numbers and rates per 100,000 population

Diagnosis	*Total cases 1961-1980*	*Average annual registration rate per 100,000 population*
Leukaemia	14	4·57
Lymphatic cancer	8	2·61

Great care should be taken in trying to draw conclusions from these figures. The data are based on very few cancer registrations; the age structure of the population also has to be considered. Both these factors can lead to differences between the local and national figures. After adjustment for the age structure, the standardised registration ratios for leukaemia and lymphatic cancer for the period 1961-1980 in Bradfield RD for ages 0-24 years are 159 and 116 respectively, compared with 100 in England and Wales as a whole. These differences (ie between 159 and 100, and 116 and 100) are not as large as might be expected to arise from chance variations due to the small number of cases in Bradfield RD.

It is not possible to determine whether enhanced recognition and registration of leukaemia and lymphatic cancer in Bradfield RD, or different diagnostic terms, accounts for any of the excess.

Anti-arthritic Drugs

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be in a position to give a substantive answer to the question from the right hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, South requesting an estimate of the number of deaths each year due to the effects of all anti-arthritic drugs, to which a holding answer was given on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *620*.

Mr. Hayhoe: I replied to the right hon. Member on 11 February.

Disabled People (Evictions)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the repossession of houses occupied by, or eviction of, families with one or more disabled family member without prior consultation with local social services departments; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I have been asked to reply.

No. It is for the mortgagees, landlord and the courts to decide, taking account of all the circumstances, on the most appropriate course of action in cases of arrears or default.

Social Security (Reform)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the changes in disposable income after meeting housing costs as a result of the changes proposed in housing benefit in Cmnd. 9691, by client group, on the same basis as the tables showing the effect of structural reform, including the 20 per cent. rates contribution, in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 15 January 1986, c. *596*]: Using the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691), including a contribution to domestic rates of 20 per cent., the estimated changes in disposable income are shown in the table. For most households on income support, diminished entitlement arising from the housing benefit changes will be wholly or partially offset by increased entitlement arising from the switch from supplementary benefit to income support; the combined effect in these cases is shown in table 10B of the technical annex but, for the reasons given in the notes to the table following, the estimates are not exactly compatible. For most working families with children, decreased entitlement arising from the housing benefit changes will be wholly or partially offset by increased entitlement arising from the switch from FIS to family credit; the combined effect in these cases is shown in table 12(ii)B of the technical annex.

Housing Benefit: Changes in disposable income after meeting housing costs by client group
Effect of structural reform of housing benefit

Thousands

Client group	*Increases*						*Total increased*	*No change*	*Total decreased*	*Decreases*					
	£5+	*£4 to £5*	*£3 to £4*	*£2 to £3*	*£1 to £2*	*£1*				*£1*	*£1 to £2*	*£2 to £3*	*£3 to £4*	*£4 to £5*	*£5+*
Pensioners age 80+	*	*	10	10	30	30	90	170	440	220	190	40	*	*	*
Pensioners age 60 to 79	10	*	20	30	70	90	220	630	2,300	930	950	230	100	40	30
Sick or disabled	10	*	10	20	10	20	70	30	110	40	60	10	*	*	*
Lone parents	*	*	*	*	*	10	10	30	530	150	280	20	20	10	60
Couples with children															
in full time work	10	*	10	10	10	10	50	30	320	60	90	70	30	30	30
not in full time work	10	*	*	*	10	*	20	10	540	200	290	30	*	*	10
Others															
in full time work	10	*	*	*	10	*	10	10	210	30	60	40	20	20	60
not in full time work	*	*	*	10	10	*	20	110	670	200	300	50	10	10	90
TOTAL	40	10	50	80	150	160	490	1,020	5,110	1,830	2,210	490	180	110	300

Notes:

(1) These estimates are based entirely on the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) simulation model. As explained in paragraph 2.8 of the Technical Annex, estimates of the combined effects of the income support and housing benefit changes on claimants currently claiming supplementary benefit were based on a model which imputed levels of general rates using 1982 (ie pre-housing benefit) data. This was done because there is no single source which includes information on both general rates and details of supplementary benefits requirements. When the effect of the housing benefit changes alone is required, more accurate results are obtained from the FES model. The certificated caseload derived from the FES has been adjusted to match the caseload implicit in the Technical Annex; this is somewhat different from that derived from local authority subsidy claims (as published in the Public Expenditure White Paper).

(2) The estimates exclude the effects of the family credit proposals.

(3) The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.

(4) Some totals may not be equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will provide estimates for November 1985 of the number of standard housing benefit recipients, in total and according to the following household types *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* working households with children, distinguishing between couples and single parents, *(c)* working households without children, *(d)* others with children, distinguishing between couples and single parents, *(e)* others without children:

(2) if he will provide estimates of the numbers of losers resulting from the changes to standard housing benefit proposed in the White Paper on the reform of social security, Cmnd. 9691, including the suggested 20 per cent. rate contribution; how many of these would lose entitlement to housing benefit altogether; and if he will break the above estimate down into the following categories *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* working households with children, distinguishing between couples and single parents, *(c)* working households without children, *(d)* others with children, distinguishing between couples and single parents, *(e)* others without children.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to the replies*, 16 January 1986, c. *702* and c. *698*]: Using the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691) including a contribution to domestic rates of 20 per cent., the information requested is as follows:

Standard housing benefit: caseload and numbers affected by proposals
Thousands, Great Britain

	Estimated number of recipients under present scheme	*Estimated number with reduced entitlement (including, in brackets, number with no entitlement)*	
Pensioners	2,430	1,470	(310)
Working households with children			
—couples	370	310	(110)
—lone parents	80	70	(30)
Working households without children	230	200	(100)
Others with children			
—couples	100	60	(10)
—lone parents	90	80	(10)
Others without children	330	210	(50)
All households	3,630	2,410	(620)

Notes:

1. Present scheme estimates have been made on a similar basis to that outlined in paragraph 2.10 of the Technical Annex. The total is consistent with the estimated numbers claiming standard housing benefit at November 1985.
2. Estimates of numbers with reduced entitlement exclude the effects of family credit.
3. The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.
4. Some totals may not be equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many households *(a)* in total, *(b)* by tenure (council tenants, home-owners and others) and *(c)* by household type (pensioners, families with children and others) are expected to receive (i) more and (ii) less housing benefit by up to £1 a week, £1 to £1·99 a week, £2 to £2·99 a week, £3 to £3·99 a week, £4 to £4·99 a week, £5 to £7·49 a week, £7·50 to £9·99 a week and £10 a week or more as a result of the following changes to the housing benefit scheme outlined in the White Paper (1) the requirements that all households should meet at least 20 per cent. of their rates, (2) the changes to the needs allowance and taper formulae and (3) the treatment of capital; and if he will identify the gains and losses attributable to each of these changes individually and to the cumulative impact of all three.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1986, c. *62-3*]: The information is not readily available in the precise form requested. Using the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691), estimates of the effects of the structural reform to housing benefit, with and without a 20 per cent. contribution to domestic rates, analysed by tenure and household type, are shown in the tables. As explained in paragraph 2.12 of the technical annex, estimates of capital are highly uncertain; it is not therefore possible to provide a precise analysis of the effects of the structural change to the capital rules.

For most households on income support, diminished entitlement arising from the housing benefit changes will be wholly or partially offset by increased entitlement arising from the switch from supplementary benefit to income support; the combined effect in these cases is shown in table 10B of the technical annex but, for the reasons given in the notes to the table following, the estimates are not exactly compatible. For most working families with children, decreased entitlement arising from the housing benefit changes will be wholly or partially offset by increased entitlement arising from the switch from FIS to family credit; the combined effect in these cases is shown in table 12(ii)B of the technical annex.

TABLE 1

Housing Benefit: Changes in disposable income after meeting housing costs without 20 per cent. rates contribution: by tenure and household type
Effect of structural reform of housing benefit

Thousands

Client group	*Increases*						*Total increased*	*No change*	*Total decreased*	*Decreases*					
	£5+	*£4 to £5*	*£3 to £4*	*£2 to £3*	*£1 to £2*	*£1*				*£1*	*£1 to £2*	*£2 to £3*	*£3 to £4*	*£4 to £5*	*£5+*
By tenure:															
Local authority tenants	40	40	40	130	220	200	670	2,090	700	120	180	90	60	60	180
Owner occupiers	10	20	30	110	270	210	630	1,250	350	170	120	50	10	10	*
Others	20	10	20	40	70	60	210	570	300	50	80	50	30	30	60
By household type:															
Pensioners	20	40	60	200	460	410	1,180	2,130	650	230	220	110	40	20	30
Families with children	30	20	10	40	60	40	200	1,090	360	50	110	40	40	30	90
Others	10	10	20	30	40	20	130	690	340	70	50	50	30	40	120
TOTAL	70	70	80	270	560	470	1,510	3,920	1,350	350	380	190	110	90	240

Notes:

(1) These estimates are based entirely on the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) simulation model. As explained in paragraph 2.8 of the Technical Annex, estimates of the combined effects of the income support and housing benefit changes on claimants currently claiming supplementary benefit were based on a model which imputed levels of general rates using 1982 (ie pre-housing benefit) data. This was done because there is no single source which includes information on both general rates and details of supplementary benefits requirements. When the effect of the housing benefit changes alone is required, more accurate results are obtained from the FES model. The certificated caseload derived from the FES has been adjusted to match the caseload implicit in the Technical Annex; this is somewhat different from that derived from local authority subsidy claims (as published in the Public Expenditure White Paper).
(2) The estimates exclude the effects of the family credit proposals.
(3) The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.
(4) Some totals may not be equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

TABLE 2

Housing Benefit: Changes in disposable income after meeting housing costs with 20 per cent. rates contribution: by tenure and household type
Effect of structural reform of housing benefit

Thousands

Client group	Increases						Total increased	No change	Total decreased	Decreases					
	£5+	£4 to £5	£3 to £4	£2 to £3	£1 to £2	£1				£1	£1 to £2	£2 to £3	£3 to £4	£4 to £5	£5+
By tenure:															
Local authority tenants	30	10	30	40	100	90	300	330	2,800	890	1,280	260	90	60	210
Owner occupiers	*	*	*	20	20	50	90	460	1,590	680	700	140	50	10	10
Others	20	*	10	20	30	20	100	240	720	250	230	90	50	30	80
By household type:															
Pensioners	10	*	20	40	110	130	310	800	2,740	1,150	1,140	270	100	40	30
Families with children	20	10	10	10	10	20	90	80	1,440	420	690	120	50	40	120
Others	10	*	10	20	30	10	80	140	940	250	380	100	30	30	150
TOTAL	40	10	50	80	150	160	490	1,020	5,110	1,830	2,210	490	180	110	300

Notes:
(1) These estimates are based entirely on the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) simulation model. As explained in paragraph 2.8 of the Technical Annex, estimates of the combined effects of the income support and housing benefit changes on claimants currently claiming supplementary benefit were based on a model which imputed levels of general rates using 1982 (ie pre-housing benefit) data. This was done because there is no single source which includes information on both general rates and details of supplementary benefits requirements. When the effect of the housing benefit changes alone is required, more accurate results are obtained from the FES model. The certificated caseload derived from the FES has been adjusted to match the caseload implicit in the Technical Annex; this is somewhat different from that derived from local authority subsidy claims (as published in the Public Expenditure White Paper).
(2) The estimates exclude the effects of the family credit proposals.
(3) The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.
(4) Some totals may not be equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give a breakdown of the losers from the £450 million cut in housing benefit under the Social Security Bill, by category of claimant and by numbers losing less than £1 per week, £1 to £2, £2 to £3, £3 to £4, £4 to £5, £5 to £6, £6 to £7, and more than £7 per week.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 February 1986, c. *286*]: I refer the hon. Member to my reply today to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) which sets out the information that is readily available. This table shows the effect of the housing benefit changes only and so excludes the effect of family credit which is likely to contribute something in the range of £25-£50 million towards the overall reduction in housing benefit expenditure, on the basis of the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691).

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of households *(a)* in total, *(b)* by tenure and *(c)* by household type (pensioners, families with children and others) that will cease to qualify for any housing benefit as a result of the following changes to the housing benefit scheme outlined in the White Paper; (i) the changes to the needs allowance and taper formulae, and in the assessment of income and (ii) the treatment of capital.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1986, c. *62-3*]: Using the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691), without a contribution to domestic rates of 20 per cent. the estimated numbers who will cease to be entitled to housing benefits, analysed by tenure and household type, are shown in the table. As explained in paragraph 2.12 of the technical annex, estimates of capital are highly uncertain: it is not therefore possible to provide a precise analysis of the effects of the structural change to the capital rule.

Effect of structural reform of housing benefit without 20 per cent. rates contribution

Thousands

	Numbers ceasing to be entitled to housing benefit
All households	360
Tenure type	
—local authority tenants	150
—owner-occupiers	130
—others	80
Household type	
—pensioners	140
—families with children	110
—others	110

Notes:
1. The estimates exclude the effects of the family credit proposals.
2. The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.
3. Some totals may not be equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Benefits

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what he estimates he will spend on single payments in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88; and if he will publish a table showing the real value of single payments in these years compared with 1984-85;

(2) what he estimates he will spend on heating additions in the years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88; and if he will publish a table showing the real value of heating additions in these years compared with 1984-85.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 23 January 1986, c. *310*]: Estimates of supplementary benefit expenditure are made on the basis of broad claimant types and separate, reliable projections of future expenditure for specific components such as heating additions and single payments are not available. In the financial year 1984-85 expenditure on single payments was £241 million while in the current financial year expenditure until 14 January 1986 was £243 million. No equivalent information for heating additions is available and the usual detailed survey

data have been delayed as the result of the Newcastle dispute but it is estimated that expenditure on heating additions in 1984-85 was about £400 million.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table similar to table 6A in the technical annex to the social security White Paper, Cmnd. 9691 showing, *(a)* the number of people in each client group who will be unaffected by his proposals, *(b)* the numbers gaining or losing less than £1, *(c)* the numbers gaining or losing between £1 and £5 and *(d)* the numbers gaining or losing between £5 and £10, distinguishing in each case between (i) child benefit, (ii)supplementary benefit or income support (iii) family income supplement or family credit, (iv) free school meals, (v) free welfare milk and (vi) housing benefit, assuming a minimum 20 per cent. rates contribution.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 January 1986, c. *507*]: I regret that the information is not readily available in the precise form requested.

Information about the impact of the change from supplementary benefit to income support and from family income supplement to family credit is, respectively, in tables 1A and 3(i)A of the technical annex.

In both cases a notional cash value for free school meals and milk is included in the tables; separate reliable estimates are not available for these benefits.

The following table gives information about the impact of the changes in housing benefit, including the effects of the family credit proposals, using the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex. For the reasons given in the notes to the table, these estimates are not exactly compatible with the technical annex. Child benefit is not affected by the structural reforms.

Housing benefit: changes in disposable income after meeting housing costs: by client group
Cash position at point of change

Thousands

Client group	*Increases*			*Total increased*	*No change*	*Total decreased*	*Decreases*		
	£5+	*£1-£5*	*<£1*				*<£1*	*£1-£5*	*£5+*
Pensioners age 80+	*	50	40	90	170	440	210	230	*
Pensioners age 60-79	10	130	90	230	620	2,310	890	1,380	40
Sick or disabled	10	40	20	70	30	110	30	70	*
Single parents	*	*	*	*	30	540	130	340	70
Couples with children									
—in full-time work	10	*	10	20	20	370	20	210	140
—not in full-time work	10	10	*	20	20	530	180	340	10
Others									
—in full-time work	10	10	*	10	10	210	20	140	50
—not in full-time work	*	20	*	20	110	670	190	390	90
Total	40	260	150	460	1,010	5,170	1,670	3,100	400

Notes:

(1) These estimates are based entirely on the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) simulation model. As explained in paragraph 2.8 of the Technical Annex, estimates of the combined effects of the income support and housing benefit changes on claimants currently claiming supplementary benefit were based on a model which imputed levels of general rates using 1982 (ie pre-housing benefit) data. This was done because there is no single source which includes information on both general rates and details of supplementary benefits requirements. When the effect of the housing benefit changes alone is required more accurate results are obtained from the FES model.

(2) The estimates include the effect of a 20 per cent. rates contribution.

(3) The estimates include the effect on housing benefit of the family credit proposals.

(4) The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.

(5) Numbers have been rounded to 10,000 (* means a figure of less that 5,000). Due to rounding, some totals may not be equal to the sum of the component parts.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 91**

SESSION 1985–86

3rd February—14th February 1986

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speakers rulings and statements.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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